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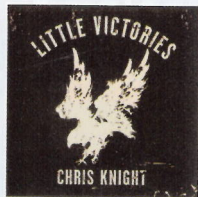
REVIEWED: VINTAGE, SCHENK, TAKAMINE, PEERLESS VIRTUOSO, PRS SE, ORTEGA + MORE



JOHN MARTYN
REMEMBERING JOHN MARTYN
WWW.SECRETCORDSLIMITED.COM/

This double-disc compilation of unreleased studio and live sessions from the 70s, 80s and 90s first appeared as *Mad* in 2004. It remains a treasure trove for the curious and a safe starting point for the curious. His inimitable voice, the honeyed growl of a grizzly bear, is buoyed by top class support and mates like David Gilmour and Phil Collins. Overall, it's a generous helping of favourites, with the more stripped-down affair, showcasing the live work in the esteemed company of spirit Danny Thompson, whose fluid bass lines and Martyn's freewheeling fretboard explorations in a rich loam. A posthumous footnote, maybe, but nevertheless a fitting tribute to a wayward genius.

STEVE BENNETT



CHRIS KNIGHT
LITTLE VICTORIES
WWW.CHRISKNIGHT.NET

When he was fifteen-years-old Chris Knight taught himself to play guitar mainlining John Prine's songs, and it sure as heck shows. From the opening bars of 'In 'The Mean Time' and his raggedy ass vocals, this Kentucky émigré who quickly found Nashville veneration has come up with a gem. Chris's forte are mid tempo numbers, held down by rock solid bass playing and guitarist Mike McAdam's splashes of grinding distorted chords recalling Neil Young, and Richard Thompson on his manic spiky solos. But it wouldn't mean diddley squat if it wasn't for the main man and his agonised drawl. Chris peels of a clutch of dark God fearing tales of hard Southern times on a superb set that recalls the Band's finest hours. Americana as good as it gets.

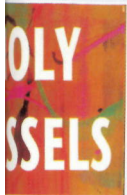
JULIAN PIPER



SMALL TOWN JONES
FREIGHT SHIPS
WWW.JIMJONES.CO.UK

Jim Jones's hushed, tuneful Americana has already given rise to an "English Bon Iver" tag and although the plaintive, cracked tenor may over-reach itself uncomfortably on opener 'Waves', from there on in there's no doubting the quality of the songwriting. The soft-rolling title track simmers gently with what used to be called "bedsit introspection", similarly the standout, less-is-more, Ry Cooder-ish acoustic balladry of 'Things That We Don't Need To Say'. 'Something Real' and 'Big Screen Reality' pick up the pace and by the end of these ten originals it's impossible not to be won over by the careworn elegance of the playing and this fine debut's overall generosity of spirit.

STEVE BENNETT

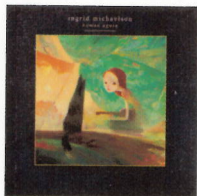


HOLY VESSELS
LAST ORDERS AT THE MARSHALL ARMS
WWW.HOLYVESSELS.CO.UK

Bar-band country and ramshackle rockabilly are the order of the day for this debut from a Brighton-based

band, when everything comes together, conjure up the great Ronnie Lane's Slim Chance, notably on the inimitable 'Springtime Bloom', all freight train snare and plaintive lap steel, and 'Down By The Wayside', a disguised take on Dylan's 'You Ain't Going Nowhere'. The writing consistency wavers, however, missing the the queasy, 'Peeping Tom' and an over-earnest 'The War'. The album runs out of steam half way off into Georgia Satellites-lite via 'In Your and 'Jaycee'. Still, enough hints of the sophisticated rock of Ace and Brinsley Schwartz bode well for the future.

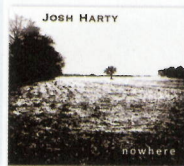
STEVE BENNETT



INGRID MICHAELSON
HUMAN AGAIN
WWW.INGRIDMICHAELSON.COM

Already a successful writer of US, TV-friendly, indie-pop and the Cheryl Cole hit, 'Parachute', there's far more substance than one might expect on these thirteen intriguing originals from a singer-songwriter who's strong on melody, has an intelligent way with a line and is unafraid of bold, challenging arrangements. While there are hints of Cindy Lauper on 'This Is War' and Stevie Nicks on rocker 'Blood Brothers', Michaelson's got her own clear vision; the adventurous, orchestral sweep of 'Do It Now' or the aching piano ballad 'I'm Through'. From Bangles bubblegum ('Palm of Your Hand') to intimate, jazzy vulnerability ('Keep Warm') this is highly-sophisticated girl-pop for grown-ups. Madonna could do worse than sign her up for a much-needed late-career boost.

STEVE BENNETT



JOSH HARTY
NOWHERE
WWW.JOSHARTY.COM

A North Dakota singer-songwriter who's the son of a small town police chief-preacher is already boasting some pretty unassailable Americana credentials. This seven-track extended EP only serves to bolster them further. From the rolling, Welch/Rawlings-style opener 'Whisky and Morphine' it's straight to the front porch with a voice, part Gordon Lightfoot part Steve Goodman, floating lazily over understated bass, fiddle and mandolin on a series of dusty, run-down reveries of hope and world-weariness. 'Yesterday' has that wistful, Danny Whitten stamp of classic country-rock balladry while the stormy '6th Avenue' darkens the palette with stabs of minor key dobro. A Box Hill-to-Badlands take on Richard Thompson's classic 'Vincent Black Lightning 1952' rounds things off with an appropriate stab of rueful, outlaw heartbreak.

STEVE BENNETT

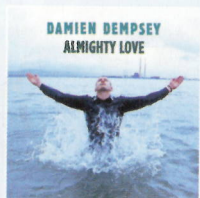


TANITA TIKARAM
CAN'T GO BACK
WWW.TANITA-TIKARAM.COM

From the clattering, blues-rock opener, 'All Things To You', all velvet-smoked voice

and sure, KD Lang swagger, Tikaram comes across as Alison Krauss and Robert Plant in one highly-packaged on this, her first release in eight years. Back sessioneers help; Grant Lee Phillips on vocals and (for that added Band of Joy vibe) - on the trademark rumbling drums. Single, 'My Shoes' comes with knockout Delaney and Bonnie country/soul chorus and there are nods to Springfield throughout, particularly on the 'Black & Roll'. The title track is classy, Carole King/Janet Monaghan, midnight-on-Broadway melancholia and the Kiss' indicates a class act, not just back, but in top form.

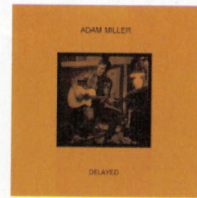
STEVE BENNETT



DAMIEN DEMPSEY
ALMIGHTY LOVE
WWW.GRENBARTLEY.COM

Big-voiced Dubliner, Dempsey has never lacked for passion. Half a dozen albums into his career, he's finally found the songs to go with it. The uncompromising anger and political commitment are still firmly intact, as on the stadium-shaking 'Bustin Outta Here' but there's also new-found maturity (he's 37) on eleven originals that boast the compositional flair of an Irish Billy Bragg. Proclaimers fans will lap up the soaring, anthemic title track and Dempsey finds a genuine sense of place in the heart-breaking cautionary tale of 'Chris and Stevie'. He's also looking to develop an intriguing "world" musicality, particularly on the churning Sting/Gabriel-like 'Born Without Hate'. A hero in his homeland, on this evidence, greater international recognition can't be far off.

STEVE BENNETT



ADAM MILLER
DELAYED
WWW.ADAMMILLER.COM.AU

Virtuoso fingerstyle albums are musical Marmite (or Vegemite in this hugely-talented Aussie's case) - either to be loved or avoided. Miller presents thirteen dazzling original instrumentals here, all solo, all played on the one guitar, provoking (as with the wearing of pink football boots) the stipulation that "you have to be good". This is an hour-long exercise in building grooves that weave and expand through complex melodic and percussive variations, and while non-guitarists may not get it, players will shake their heads at the precision, technical facility and sheer verve (before trying to steal as many licks as possible until their fingers drop off). Ultimately, though, more memorable tunes (which Tommy Emmanuel, for one, appears to have twigged) might widen the appeal.

STEVE BENNETT