

FolkWorld #51 07/2013

CD & DVD Reviews

The Irish Rovers "Drunken Sailor" Rover Records; 2012



When a band called the Irish Rovers releases an album with the bawdy classic "Drunken Sailor" as the title cut, I would guess that you would not a review to tell you what to expect. And certainly if you know anything about the Irish Rovers during the last 50-odd years they have been together, you should know what you will get here. And with founding member George Millar leading the way with his cousin Ian and some fine traditional players, there is classic Irish style and some good energy present in these songs... all suitable for a late night in the pub.

© David Hintz

www.irishroversmusic.com

Current Swell "Long Time Ago" Nettwerk, 2013

This is modern folk-rock that has a little bit of that Felice Brothers meets Elliott Brood style here at work. I particular like the way the electric guitars kick in during "Honest Man" which offsets the more folky songs. There is a rhythm and blues feeling in the vocal work, which along with the percussion brings a little swing into the arrangements. There may be even too much R&B for some people, but the music is comfortable and engaging throughout the album. There is also a nice sting in the guitar work as well, even when they are not rocking out. The songs consistently connect and show enough creative spark allowing the band to resonate with a large audience. And they seem to be touring the world, so I sense Current Swell and audience will be connecting a lot in 2013.

© David Hintz

www.currentswell.com

Stonecraft "Behind the Door" Own label; 2013

Stonecraft is a folk duo who, although located in France, spent time in South Wales performing their original yet familiar Celtic based material. The acoustic guitars, citterns, and bouzoukis ring out with resonant assurance. The male lead vocals are like a light Martin Cockerham (Spirogyra), yet when the female harmonies in "Secret World" kick in, you have all the luscious qualities that you would find in Dulcimer or Magna Carta, or even Spirogyra. "North

www.stonecraftmusic.co.uk

Sea Lights" even has a mystical/psychedelic arrangement as the acoustic guitars take on a drone chant over a simple bass line. There is some real magic within. This is akin to "The Wicker Man" soundtrack, which although has traditional sounding tunes, takes off in psychedelic directions and has become a classic of the psyche-folk scene. There are deep Scandanavian-like droning patterns here as well, as this is music is familiar, yet exotic and personal as well. This third Stonecraft album has carved a permanent place in my collection and may have to make room for their first two albums when next I shop.

© David Hintz

Lisa Cee "My Turn"

Rip Cat Records, 2013

California blues may be the blues, but there is usually something else going on, like in this case—a bit of that Laurel Canyon singer songwriter vibe. Admittedly, there is not a whole lot of that here as the blues is first and foremost, with plenty of good funky rock beats. There's some interesting bluesy funk in a cover of "I'll Take You There", while her cover of "White Rabbit" featured deep saxophone soloing along with the required powerful vocals. The originals are decent and overall this is a pretty good funky blues-rock record, especially considering this is Lisa Cee's debut release.

www.myspace.com/lisacee

© David Hintz

Joe Treewater "The Ice Cream Social"

Own label; 2013

Treewater has that certain early seventies folk-rock feel with just a touch of psychedelia reminiscent of many bands from Europe or the western USA. It's got a sound like a 'Dino Valente meets Donovan' when it works best, such as on the title cut or "Monkey". It is a bit lighter at other times, but always seems to manage something interesting. There is a lo-fi, real person vibe here, but the recording is decent and the arrangements offer some spacey guitars fading in and out of more grounded sounds. There are a few songs that are a little too laid back and forgettable, but the highlights are worth going back to and show a promise that may be realized over time.

www.joetreewater.com

© David Hintz

Dave Armo "Poets on the Wall"

Own label; 2012

Californian Dave Armo takes you to some pretty strange scenic views on his third album. From the quivering voice in the modern folk rock of "Every Night I Call Out Your Name" to the gloriously bombastic rock of "It Has Been So Cold in California", there is something different going on. It is an interesting combination of classic laid-back California style with a modern pop-rock approach. Some of the vocal work is just too derivative of this modern quirky stoner style to wear well over

www.davearmo.com

the course of the album (Think Devandra Coyne/Wayne Banhart). But the melodies and arrangements are good on this album and this should find an audience.

© David Hintz

Diving for Sunken Treasure "Motherfucker Jazz Bar"

Rookie Records, 2013

Delicate Nick Drake folk style is evident here... and if you believe that, you must have skipped over the title of this album. Nope, this is much more classic gypsy-punk here. And although that genre is swarming like locusts these days, I find this band stands out by paying attention to the underlying world folk beats before revving things up to speed. They invoke the punk-Americana of a band like Slim Cessna's Auto Club, while also adding lots of European style as well. Of course the energy is high and thankfully these songs are quite tuneful. This is adventurous fun and far from the cliché for those that may be tiring of this style (at least when not in a club, where it is nearly always a fun time). The band is from Berlin, but I would be at the club very early if they made it to my side of the Atlantic.

© David Hintz

www.divingforsunkentreasure.com

Timothy Wenzel "A Coalescence of Dreams"

Own label; 2012

In yet another case of you CAN judge a book by its cover, the title and artwork on this release loudly whisper 'new age' to you. Wenzel's specialty is the keyboards—actually it is physical organic chemistry, but that is the day job. Late at night, he dreams up soft instrumental passages that are full of melody and passion. His arrangements are smooth, of course, but there is enough variation of keyboards, flutes, strings, and percussion. This is a good listen, maybe not distinguishable from other new age albums (I'm not the first to say that), but I like the arrangements more than most as there are fewer saccharine moments, and thankfully more thoughtful passages.

© David Hintz

www.timothywenzel.com

Bourbon Boys "Shotguns, Trucks & Cattle"

Despot Z Records; 2013

I grew up with far too much southern rock in the southern Ohio town that I called home. So it amazes me that far from those hot and sticky humid nights with greasy southern fried crackers sitting at an even greasier bar, a band like the Bourbon Boys plays the music they do in northern Sweden. So my personal cliché is something highly unique to their world and I can certainly state that they do this style of music proud to the point where no one would guess that they weren't born on Tobacco Road. This is barroom music at its best (worst

www.bourbonboyoofficial.com

for some), so if you don't want to duck chairs flying across the room, then steer clear. But if you want another look into the genre, you could do a lot worse than the Bourbon Boys.

© David Hintz

Steve Sinnicks "The Last Irishman in Corktown" Own label; 2012

Whether this Canadian Irishman plays solo guitar or sings in front of a sharp folk-rock band, his songs shine brightly. The key is that his clean, crisp vocals bring out the emotion and meaning of each line of his lyrics. The lyrics are filled with classic folk topics of politics, religion, and simple human emotion. Yet, I will put Sinnicks above much of the pack in terms of balancing direct dialect with poetic flourish. Again, the delivery sends it all forward with music that will stick to you, deeper with every listen. It is no surprise he has won awards with his songwriting in the past, and this album has already garnered some awards in Canada. I think folk fans worldwide would agree.

www.sinnicks.com

© David Hintz

Varwin "Varwin" Own label; 2013

There is a lot of worldly folk in this folk/light rock/world music album. And why not, as Varwin has travelled extensively across this planet. Some of this sounds like he may have left the planet for a time, as there is some nice psychedelic touch in the creative song writing. You could expect a didgeridoo in a song called "Walkabout" and he delivers. There is some more conventional psychedelic sound with the sitar, but it is still mostly guitars and vocals. The vocal style reminds me a bit of Fresh Maggots (that's actually a psyche-folk band, not a thrash band oddly enough). Whereas the songs move around a bit in style, they still maintain a nice personality throughout. You can download the album for free, so why not give this a try?

www.varwin.com

© David Hintz

Askehoug! "Je te Tuerai un Jeudi" Adami; 2013

I am glad that the Askehoug's website biography begins with a question asking to describe the Askehoug's experience, since that is even more of a challenge here than in most of the CDs I listen to. First, this is French language music from Matthieu Aschehough who has enlisted a rhythm section and formed this band, named as a variant of his last name. The title translates to "I'll Kill You One Thursday" which is a good clue as any as to the eclectic nature here. The first cut sounds like artificial blues, but thankfully they switch off to a twisted lounge music that encompasses jazz, experimental rock with a lot of spoken word material that reminds me of Serge Gainsbourg. Although Serge didn't use electronics, at least not like this based on my listening experience. There is also a strange rap on the song with some dark background noise making it positively spooky, far from urban hip. Askehoug gets nearly a maximum score on

www.askehoug.com

creativity, and although it is not an obvious charmer, this album should be listened to at least once. Yet it will take many more times needed for complete understanding, if you ever get there.

© David Hintz

Joe Driscoll & Sekou Kouyate "Faya" Localization Records; 2013

There are no easy categories or genres to slot this album into.

But, let's try anyway. If you like quality guitar work that is both fast and innovative, give this record a spin. And if you are like

www.joeandsekou.com

me, you will hear some classic blues, African blues, flamenco, classical, and perhaps some psychedelic touches (similar to a modern electric sound in the worldbeat style that Boiled in Lead employed).^[48] Some of the instrumental flash is on a stringed instrument from West Africa known as a kora. There are vocal styles that resemble hip-hop, reggae, and some pop soul. This sound manages to be both welcoming and mildly exciting.

© David Hintz

Attwenger "Clubs" Trikont, 2013

Compiled from live recordings, this release gives you 36 songs of accordion and drums blasting into you conscious. There are some electronics at times including what sounds like a treated Jews Harp (or temir komuz among other more interesting terms for this instrument). This is difficult to describe and not for everyone, and sometimes is a little too precious, but far more often this is crazy and exciting. There are gypsy punk elements mixed with hip hop and street percussion. It is a unique vision, suffice it to say. As most live albums, it works best as a document of how much fun this music would be in the clubs. Although sonically, there does not appear to be too much more to be gained in the studio as this is simply vibrant in your face music with percussion, rapped or intense vocals, and crazed melodies.

www.attwenger.at

And if 36 songs is not enough, there is a bonus DVD of 'Road Movies', which has an hour's worth of gigs and commentary. There is a second film that covers his trip to Austin's South by Southwest with street musicians, fan interviews, commentary in English and German, along with other gigs around America. Nothing flows particularly well, but it is a bonus after all.

© David Hintz

Whisky Trail "Celtic Fragments" Materiali Sonori, 2013

Appropriately named, this Italian collective combines many styles of Celtic music from Ireland, England, and the continent into an interesting album. There is a classical music sound and expertise

www.whiskytrail.it

(perhaps the touch of Bach helps aid that thought), along with almost a new age airiness, as well as a twee tune about lepruchans. Fans of the releases on Shanachie Records a few decades back

would be well served to give this a listen. This band started in 1975 and has come a long way from their early albums (one I own and enjoy), although the style is still rooted in Celtic traditions. But the recording here is sharp, modern, on point, and the violins and guitars ring out with clarity. I am happy to see they are still around and still in such fine musical voice, complete with a nice mix of traditional songs, played with heart and precision.

© David Hintz

Jeremy Dion "Golden Some Day" Inner View Records; 2013

Jeremy Dion is from my former state of Colorado. And while he does not quite succeed with the Herculean task in fully transporting me to the beautiful vistas of that state, he does take me back into the west with these eleven songs. He starts with a folk base, and brings in some light bluegrass touches and a bit of rock. Each song has a personality to it, carrying a mix of emotions from both the music and voice. I particularly enjoy the depths of "Good as the Rain" which is as good a song as I would expect from Woven Hand or Munly, mainstays of the 'Denver sound'. Not all of the songs resonate at such a high level, but they are all easy on the ear. And if Jeremy Dion can expand this as he continues writing music, he could find his way to some larger stages. I just hope he never loses the 'Colorado' in him.

www.jeremydion.com

© David Hintz

Melinda Ortner "I Wanna Be OK" Own label; 2013

This one begins far from the folk world, with more of a Eurythmics synthesizer rock base. Instead of Annie Lennox vocals, Melinda Ortner's style is closer to that of Ritzy Bryan of the Joy Formidable. The songs vary in between an older style and more modern rock. There are pretty nice pop hooks in many of the cuts, and even something that would get you up moving around, although I would not call this dance music. It is crisp and clean and some of the songs move into the blues chanteuse territory. I do feel that as the album moves on, things get a little too comfortable and I would have preferred an artistic jolt or two. Otherwise, this could be successful.

www.myspace.com/melindaortner

© David Hintz

Sarah Blasko "I Awake" Universal Music; 2013

From Australia, comes this fascinating singer who is coming to the northern hemisphere in a big way. She has sung complete with orchestra at the Sydney Opera House, one of the world's biggest and boldest stages. And on this album, you can hear many of the reasons why she could succeed in a big way. Although she has a delicacy not unlike Savage Rose's Annette, her flexibility is her key asset as she transitions from different levels of intensity. She even has a bit of that

www.sarahblasko.com

magical tone in Karen Dalton's voice. Musically, this has a lot of keyboards and has an ethereal 4AD quality throughout. There are also creative shifts in the songs, and although they are catchy enough, there are plenty of unique sounds and patterns to keep those of us that of 'heard it all' reminded of the fact we have not heard it all. I would love to see her on a stage near me some day, but I will have this to listen to until then.

© David Hintz

Jaron Freeman-Fox and the Opposite of Everything "S/T"

Own label; 2013

Frothy and robust, this ale—scratch that, band—features a hot fiddle, intricate percussion and bass, keys, sax, clarinet and everything in the vocal front

www.theoppositeofeverything.com

from luscious chorales to scat improvised something or other. Eclectic? Well, let us start there and add jazzy, worldly, urban modern... this is a gumbo of intriguing ingredients that thankfully does not get muddled or confused. But it is not all quality playing. This band makes the Doors "People are Strange" true by showing that unlike the Doors, they can make it sound twisted and strange. Flat out fun throughout all 13 songs here. They would be an absolute trip live, and this record will have you hoping for that day. Give it a listen, you won't hear anything quite like it again for a long time if ever.

© David Hintz

Ralfe Band "Son Be Wise"

Highline Records; 2013

I take an immediate interest in bands that sound like they intimately understand a past era, while creating a fresh original modern style.

www.ralfeband.com

Of course, this is one of those records. Oly Ralfe is the man behind the band and is (actually not very) fresh off doing the soundtrack for the film "Bunny and the Bull". He's released an excellent twelve songs here. Although English, he brings continental Europe and America to the sound with hearty roots music. As for eras, he takes elements from the Beau Brummels and moves forward through Richard Buckner territory. There is a lilting, slow moving train quality to this music, both wistful and contemplative.

© David Hintz

Brad Mackeson "1945"

Own label; 2013

Recorded in 2011, this album has rich, full production. Mackeson was from Portland and has since moved to Nashville.

www.bradmackeson.com

I hope he never loses the Portland side of his music, as that city has some of the more eclectically creative musicians anywhere. Then again, there is not enough of that here, as most of this takes on a heartland Americana feeling hearkening back to the soul-

rock bands of the late 1960s. This is slick, well done, and wears its heart on its sleeve, but it does resemble much of which I have heard too many times already. But that is just me, and I suspect Brad Mackeson could easily find a very large audience out there. I won't be along for the ride.

© David Hintz

Marceese "Baby Driver" Blow Till Midnight, 2013

As someone who enjoyed seeing the band Kiss in 1976, I always felt like they were not exactly the best songwriters out there in the rock world. So what better way to test that theory, than to listen to this album of acoustic guitar and vocal folk variations of eleven Kiss songs? Well, there are probably better ways, but this is one interesting experiment for me. And the conclusion? The music works as catchy pop rock or old-fashioned rock'n'roll far more than it does as folk music (what a shock). It is easy to enjoy, aside from one annoying aspect present here. Unfortunately, there are no volume laden instruments to drown out the vocals to the point where you could not hear all the works. The 'poetry' of Kiss is alas, present in each of these songs. Next time, I hope Marceese translates the lyrics to German and I can remain blissfully ignorant of the clichés and annoying themes.

www.marceese.de

© David Hintz

Annie Keating "For Keeps" Own label; 2013

This may come from the Brooklyn, but like a lot of other things in Brooklyn these days it is more deeply rooted in places like Kansas, north Georgia, Tennessee, or a hundred other places in the US. Keating has a band that lays down some nice country-rock for her folk-country songs. She has a fine voice and a gift for a clean melody. It rather depends on the song as to how well this resonates with me. The flow in "All Gone" works well, while a few other cuts are good but don't stand out from the pack. There is a nice version of Neil Young's "Cowgirl in the Sand" to close the album.

www.anniekeating.com

© David Hintz

Chris Dair "Crossroads to Freedom" Own label; 2013

I was quite worried this was going to be a clichéd blues album, and a badly recorded one at that after I listened to the first song. But Chris Dair quickly shifted into some late 1960s kozmic styled blues, done with full psychedelic fury. He then mixes in some delicate guitar work and then adds blues, psyche-blues, and blues-rock thereafter. That does seem to be the intent here, to take those blues crossroads toward the freedom to shape his music in many different configurations. His playing is strong and fast with loads of pyrotechnic skill evident. The backing

www.chrisdairmusic.com

is just that—backing, solid without frills. He is a veteran guitarist and he clearly knows his instrument. This is a journey worth taking with him.

© David Hintz

Daniel Gilbert "Nowadays Daniel Can't Even Sing"

Gitarr Records; 2013

Thankfully, the title is a lie, although Daniel Gilbert's vocal style has some of that soft, slightly high-pitched quiriness in it that is not always to everyone's taste. Musically, this is a strong indie rock effort with lots of creative flourish between guitars, keyboards, and a strong rhythm section. Indie Rock is a crowded field, but Daniel Gilbert is as good as anybody. And in doing some research, I see that he was a key member of the Swedish band Broder Daniel, who was quite successful for a lengthy period of time in recent years. So if you are fans of that band, or just a fan of creative rock music in general, I can highly recommend this effort.

www.bede.se

© David Hintz

A.S. "Exile"

Inedible Records; 2013

You can hear the slick production early on in 'Exile', but the songs do not take long to show that they hold their own within the thick sounds in this production. The vocal work is strong with some nice female backing vocals occasionally used. This has a full rock soundscape with keyboards, thick guitars, subtle rhythm sections with the occasional drum burst. There still is a smidgen of folk (notably in the acoustic "Reasonable Doubts"), but it is more singer songwriter rock. This is out of Paris, with A.S. having Australian roots which seems to fit the sound as it is as vast as the outback, but with strong dark urban imagery. This is close to the poppier side of Radiohead and this guy has a way with a song that will likely have you coming back again to this fine record.

www.astheband.com

© David Hintz

The Levins "My Friend Hafiz"

Own label; 2013

The Levins' friend Hafiz is a 14th century Persian poet whose works inspired them to these twelve original songs based on lyrical adaptations of Daniel Ladinsky. Musically, this is rich folk music with some lighter rock touches. There are violins and keyboards in addition to the guitars along with thoughtful male/female harmonies. The harmonies remind me of the Kennedys,^[49] although the male voice is emphasized more for the Levins. The sound is also more full band in many of the arrangements here. There is also more of that British styled contemplative folk from the psyche-folk era in many of these songs.

www.thelevinsmusic.com

© David Hintz

Mikael Persson "Marks & Bleeds"

Paraply Records, 2013

Give this record a little sunlight and water and it will grow on you. It is highly familiar rural Americana folk-rock music, even as this is an International record.

www.myspace.com/mickepersson

The full band fills in with tasty guitar, punctuating keyboards, and a rhythm section that keeps things nimbly flowing. The vocal work is smooth and inviting. It has that Dire Straits style flowing nature to the songwriting. The band is similar aside from the lead guitar, which is not far off, but more restrained than Mark Knopfler. This is a highly pleasant and even rewarding listen.

© David Hintz

Thos Henley "In Hearing Taste"

K&F Records; 2013

This is singer songwriter type material in the light rock vein. There is some fascinating noisy parts fading in and out of various songs and I actually could have used more of that. That along with some

www.thoshenley.com

interesting guitar parts from time to time, are really all that bring this out away from the pack. There is nothing wrong here, just some decent songs that sound a bit similar to many others I have heard before. He has a good voice and should be able to draw some fans and with continued exploration into arrangements, could develop into an interesting musician.

© David Hintz

Bart Budwig "Whisky Girl"

Wooly Records; 2012

A lo-fi intro called "Intro" leads into a more sharply produced series of songs that vary things from mid US country rock into deeper sun soaked journeys to the far American west. At its worst it gets

www.bartbudwig.com

rather predictable (the two cover songs), but at its best there are some decent arrangements and an involving mood created by the instruments and the vocals. "Hold on Me" is a real gem, with oddball rock moves meandering around a Western alt-country twang. This is credible effort, fairly ambitious and successful enough to auger well for future releases and live shows. I will be there if he comes to a stage near me.

© David Hintz

Fuchsia "II – From Psychedelia... ..to a Distant Place"

Sound Practices; 2013

I guess I should stop getting surprised at the crazy things that happen anymore. But short of Jim Morrison, making a comeback after secretly living on an island for decades, some of these comeback second albums still have the power to surprise and amaze. The psychedelic folk world is often where this happens, as the tiny scene back in the late 1960s and 1970s is now recognized by many generations of fans of the old acts and the newer acts that embrace the style. From Comus to Caedmon or from Vashti Bunyan to Stone Angel, there have been some amazing new albums and live shows. Now, add Fuchsia to the list. Fuchsia was more of a progressive folk with lots of whimsical psychedelic fabric woven in. Amazingly or not, this album takes right off as a perfect sequel to that first album from 1971. There is still plenty of violin and progressive arrangements with Tony Durant's delicate, nearly fragile voice coming in from interesting angles. Durant can still cut a great lead guitar run as well, as evident on "Piper at the Gates". This is nothing short of magic for anyone who enjoyed the first album, as there are many memorable songs here. Even if you never heard that album, if you enjoy Spirogyra, Comus, Faun Fables, or Fit & Limo, this album that you will want to own. What is next? I could not possibly predict the next shock audio wave to enter my world.

www.fuchsiamusic.com

© David Hintz

Dar Williams "In the Time of Gods"

Razor & Tie; 2013

This is Dar Williams' first original album in five years, and her patient fans will no doubt jump at it and await the tour. They should feel their patience has been rewarded, as this has many memorable songs. From the deep opening cut to the stark piano + voice combination in "I Will Free Myself", Dar Williams sings honestly and with great feeling. The arrangements are varied enough in the classic singer songwriter style of keyboards and guitars in various interesting combinations. That is not too surprising, as the production is handled by Kevin Killen, who has worked even more complicated artists like U2 and Peter Gabriel. Thankfully, there is a measured hand atop all of this, and it flows cleanly with the songs and the singing taking center stage. Fans should consider this as one more chapter in Dar Williams' fine career.

www.darwilliams.com

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