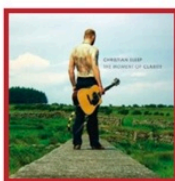


Some of these releases just slipped through the net and never received a Maverick review, so editor Alan Cackett pays them some special attention now in our regular Short Cuts review page...



to guess-work and assumptions. I'm guessing that this singer-songwriter is based in the west country as most of his gigs appear to be down that way. I'm assuming that this is his first album, as I can't find any previous releases listed. If that is the case, then it's extremely well-produced with inventive arrangements and some quite inspired songwriting by—I'm guessing—Mr Sleep. He plays guitar and keyboards and is joined by Jimi Galvin (bass), Mark Ellis (programming), Stuart Wyatt (electric violin), Mike Barnshaw (pedal steel) and Pete Nichols, Paul Harris, Alex Jabez Smith and Paul Feasey who share the drum duties. Romantic entanglements dominate even on The New Millennium, with its rich, mainly-programmed arrangement that's more about a departed lover than the changing times. There's a lush countrypolitan feel to She'll Be Waiting with gorgeous steel by Mike Barnshaw and synthesised strings. Overall an impressive album, but I'm sure that there must be a lot more inquisitive people like myself who'd like to know just who is Christian Sleep.

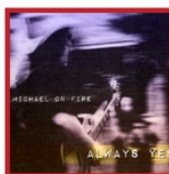
www.christiansleep.com



Nelson King • HERE AND NOW • NKR10666 • ★★★

London-based singer-songwriter who has several albums to his credit straddling blues, indie rock, guitar instrumentals and acoustic roots. This 2009 album veers towards country at times, but is basically singer-songwriter fare. The best moments come with the opening Faith No More, the hushed gravelly vocals of Sad World and the twangy All I Ever Saw. I found I Will something of a monotonous drag, but overall this guy is a pretty good writer and I would imagine more than capable of holding an audience's attention with his original material.

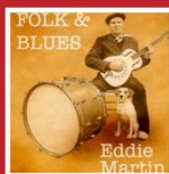
www.nelsonking.net



Michael On Fire • ALWAYS YES • Real Eyes Productions REP034 • ★★★

A new name to me, so I was kinda surprised to discover that this is Michael on Fire's 13th album. The California singer-songwriter has a sound and style that epitomises all that is so good about the Americana genre. You'll find blends of country, folk, blues and rock'n'roll running through the grooves, occasionally all in one song. Like all the very best singer-songwriters, this guy is at his best when relating a complete story in song. Chief Redbird's Violin is a prime example as in a little over five minutes he relates the tale in a convincing manner that has the listener hanging on to every word, right through until the last notes fade away. There's more of a blues vibe running through Violet Skies, with gravelly lead vocals and biting electric lead guitar. After a rough-hewn opening vocal, Silence develops into a smoothly executed ballad, with lush harmonies, ethereal saxophone and jazzy guitar. This is honest, rootsy music by a veteran artist who makes music on his own terms regardless of current fads and fancies—we celebrate artists like that, especially when the music is of such a uniformly high quality.

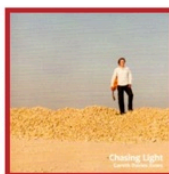
www.michaelonfire.com



Eddie Martin • FOLK & BLUES • Blueblood Records BLUEBLOOD013 • ★★★

The title really does sum this album up. It is indeed folk and blues in the old traditional meaning of the term. This British singer-songwriter-guitarist has mastered the style perfectly writing original songs that are evocative of the American folk-blues legends but has his own stamp all over them. His guitar work, very percussive, is quite incredible; he also plays a mean harmonica and provides his own foot percussion. Though most of the numbers feature a powerful rhythmic punch, especially the dynamic Let It Slide and Underwater Woman, he also slows thing down for the gorgeous Clouds Across The Sun with its lazy, summery vibe. His instrumental skills are given full rein on the mainly finger-picked Butterflies, the uptempo Still Chasing That Fox with dynamic harmonica and the closing London Blues. A highly recommended album for lovers of acoustic, bluesy guitar and down-home rootsy music.

www.bluebloodrecords.com



Gareth Davies-Jones • CHASING LIGHT • Self-released • ★★★

This talented singer-songwriter is continuing to build a following as he hones his craft. Though steeped in traditional folk, he brings his own contemporary edge to the music with an incisive writing style and a smooth, but heartfelt vocal sound that seeps easily into the listener's subconscious. The songs are lyrical and it takes a few listens before the full impact hits home. Hidden is a deeply felt song about our continuous search for answers, whether it be how something works, or more importantly the why and whereof of life itself. Stu and Debbie Hanna (Megson) add rich harmonies to Reilly, a traditional epic song given a fresh new melody that really works. In contrast Berlin To Bethlehem takes on a contemporary story of the divisive nature of building walls between nations and religions. Berlin has come down, we can only hope that one day soon the one in Bethlehem will also collapse peacefully. The musical arrangements throughout are inventive with talented studio players and guests.

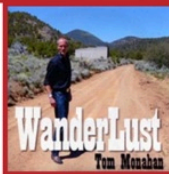
www.garethdaves-jones.com



Charlie Loesel • WESTFALIA • Incochee Trail Music ITM 001 • ★★★

This one-time computer programmer took a life-changing decision and set out on a journey in his VW Westfalia camper van with the plan of fulfilling his dream of making music. Six years later he had enough material for this, his debut album. Life on the road certainly served him well and in typical troubadour fashion, he has created some outstanding songs, mainly in a lyrical story style that has you hooked in to every word from start to finish of each song. There's a definite Randy Newman feel to Nothing To Lose with an easy old-timey jazzy feel. Cover My Tracks is a wondrous ballad with a memorable melody, a great musical backdrop and a stunning vocal. He closes with Jack Daniels And Johnny Cash, a song with a Southern gospel vibe, a Cash back-beat and a near-perfect country arrangement to embrace his easy, lazy vocals. Pure magic.

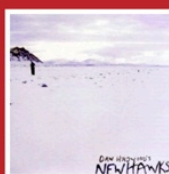
www.charliloesel.com



Tom Monahan • WANDERLUST • Self-released • ★★★

California-born singer-songwriter Monahan is a well-travelled troubadour. This latest album was recorded in a cabin in Utah with his brother Mike. It's a very rootsy, stripped-down collection of self-penned songs that explore human frailties, whether it be relationship issues such as on Running Away, personal beliefs (Driven Faith) or modern day greed (Gotta Have It). Loosely speaking this is Americana music, but with a powerful, sometimes driving rock edge typified by expert guitar picking and rough-hewn vocals. Though based in America, Tom has a close UK connection and has worked extensively on this side of the Atlantic. With albums like this, he has the potential to build a solid UK following.

www.tommonahan.co.uk



Dan Haywood • DAN HAYWOOD'S NEW HAWKS • Timbreland Recordings TMBR015CD • ★★★

One-team leader of Lancaster band the Puma-Sutras, Dan Haywood spent several months exploring the north coast of Scotland studying birds and the people he met on his travels. On his return to Lancaster, the reclusive singer-songwriter started work on the 32 songs that comprise this double-CD which is both his debut and final album. Utilising a diverse group of musicians he has brought the songs to life, from simple, almost unadorned arrangements to full-on cacophony soundscapes. Loosely speaking it is a mish-mash of country, folk, Americana, folk-rock, sensitive singer-songwriter fare that could be likened to Bowie, the Byrds, Lou Reed, David Crosby, etc without in any way sounding like any of them. An ambitious project that isn't as totally satisfying as it could be. It is a wild, uncontrolled collection that meanders all over the musical map without landing anywhere solidly. A limited edition of 400 triple vinyl box sets and 300 double CDs, I would think that that is just about the most that he can hope to sell.

www.myspace.com/newhawks

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SHORT CUTS

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