

Dave Rawlings Machine

Nashville Obsolete (Accey Records)



With help from former Old Crow Medicine Show staple Willy Watson, Dave Rawlings has put together another pretty amazing lineup of songs, sharing vocals and writing credits with Gillian Welch. After that big three, further support comes from Brittany Haas on fiddle, Jordan Tice on mandolin, and Paul Kowert on bass. There's not a dud in the lot and it's tough to single out best-ofs on this disc. Certainly *Short Haired Woman Blues*, *The Weekend*, *Bodysnatchers*, *Candy*, and *The Last Pharaoh* are all pretty great, as are *The Trip* and *Pilgrim (You Can't Go Home)* even though they clock in at lengths of 10:56 and 7:58, respectively.

Despite the title (possibly because the disc was recorded in Memphis), I don't think Nashville is going to be out of the running anytime soon musically, and especially not if Dave Rawlings and Gillian Welch are playing there. It's quite simply one of the best discs you'll hear this year.

— By Barry Hammond

Kimberly MacGregor

I Am My Own (Independent)



Kimberly MacGregor is an Edmonton singer/songwriter/guitarist with one of those big, slightly bluesy, pop/rock voices a little reminiscent of Grace Slick or someone of that calibre. She can play a pretty mean guitar, write a decent song, and sing with more



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than enough presence to fill a hall. The material on this, her second disc after 2014's *True*, is mostly in the pop/rock vein, with lots of bass and drums.

The producing credit on the disc is to her, Harry Gregg, and Stefan Kijek. This reviewer might question the necessity of putting noticeable echo and other effects on her voice in quite a few of the tracks as it certainly doesn't need the enhancement, but maybe that was part of the overall sound they were going for.

One of the most impressive tracks is *I Am Not Here*, the finale of the disc, recorded with Tzadeka (Maigen van der Giessen), whose rap/hip-hop stylings take the strong feminist stance of the lyric to an epic level. Another step in what will hopefully be a long career with lots of different twists and turns. Maybe one day we'll get to hear something a little more acoustic from this talented gal?

— By Barry Hammond

The Sweet Lowdown

Chasing the Sun (Independent)



I don't know what's better here—the melodies or the harmonies?

Victoria's The

Sweet Lowdown just keeps getting better at both, and it's a pleasure to hear this stringband trio of women continue to grow.

Their musical sensibilities are impeccable, both in the songwriting and composition of instrumentals in their blend of bluegrass, old-time, and modern folk music. The group is set apart by the harmonies, but don't discount their instrumental prowess. Banjoist Shanti Bremer is equally adept at both the Scruggs rolls and clawhammer style, while Miriam Sontenes is becoming one of the most in-demand fiddlers on the West Coast, at least when she's home. Amanda Blied's solid guitar picking and rich voice and fine songwriting round out the band.

Their songs are full of lush imagery, usually about their mutual love of nature, which is easy on Vancouver Island. My favourite is Blied's *You Can Find The North*, about feeling exiled coming from the countryside to the city.

The only thing lacking here are a couple of burning fast tunes, of which they are more than capable. But you can't have everything in 11 songs.

— By Mike Sadava

Crow and the Canyon

Leaving Soon (Independent)



Austin, TX, had the bumper stickers first: Keep Austin Weird. Portland got close on

Austin's heels, and last year there was a contest to see which was more weird.

What they also share is a musical culture that is as impressive as it is unique. Crow and the Canyon come from Portland, and put a Portland spin on bluegrass. Which sounds like a dig, perhaps, but I mean it as a compliment: they take bluegrass and make it, well, different. They can't resist rocking out from time to time, as on *Wine and Whiskey* and *Golden Chains* but it works, and the variety is welcome.

The musicians here are young, musically aggressive, and—this is the kicker—they have the chops to back it all up, as well as an attention to their antecedents. The inclusion of John Hartford's *Gentle On My Mind* is a delight, both for how it is executed and for what it is. Hartford invented this stuff: music that stretches the boundaries of the genre, perhaps, yet doesn't confuse volume with energy. *Wilmington* demonstrates an impressive ability to render a ballad, as does *Brooklyn to Milwaukee*.

Leaving Home is the band's first release, and it's a very impressive debut. There's a lot to love.

— By Glen Herbert

Spiro

Welcome Joy and Welcome Sorrow (Real World)



Spiro is a Bristol, U.K., instrumental band whose style *The Guardian* has dubbed "exper-

imental folk-influenced acoustic music."

Consisting of Jane Harbour, Alex Vann, Jason Sparkes, and Jon Hunt, Spiro performs on violin, viola, mandolin, accordion, piano, acoustic guitar, and cello. Many of the tunes on their latest album, *Welcome Joy and Welcome Sorrow*, have traditional English folk tunes embedded in their own mix of original, creative tunes.

The album kicks off with *I Am the Blaze on Every Hill*, which starts off slowly then quickens in



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