

ACOUSTIC 70s



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VARIOUS ★★☆☆

WWW.WARNERBROS.COM

Easy money? When record companies treat their back catalogs and throw a bunch of tracks together, the danger signals inevitably flash. So is this one to avoid? First off forget the "acoustic" tag. And in fairness, although there are many "hits" in this three-CD set, there is also many forgotten gems. "Willing" by Little Feat, Bonnie Raitt's "Love Me Like A Man", Patti Smith's "Because The Night", and an unapologetic version by Eric Clapton of "Ladys" are all worth the price of admission. Quite how "Three Times A Lady" by The Commodores made the cut is one of those mysteries to which perhaps we shouldn't be given an answer, but there's enough here to hope it might have turned up in your stocking. **BP**



THE 19TH STREET BAND

THE THINGS THAT MATTER ★★★☆☆

WWW.19THSTREETBAND.COM

Formed by an émigré Irishman and his fiddling American wife, there's nothing deep or fancy here, just meat and potatoes good time music played with huge exuberance. Hearty hooks and harmonies abound and when the band get moving on the driving "Trouble", there's a feeling they're an express train that doesn't want to stop. As if this wasn't enough, Tom Verratti's banjo hits warp speed on the redemptive "Set Me Free", a kind of Dolly Parton workout, before Caoilaidhe Davis calms down to get wistful on "The Things That Matter". This bunch sound like they're having a ball. **JP**



FRONT COUNTRY

OTHER LOVE SONGS ★★☆☆

WWW.FRONTCOUNTRYBAND.COM

This hot quartet from the Bay Area of San Francisco are fronted by Wendy Walker, who proves when she sings the Carter Family's "Steppin' On The Gas" that she's effortlessly capable of conjuring up the sweet, aching vocals of Bonnie Raitt. It's an unexpected turn of events for an outfit who with fiddle, guitar, mandolin and banjo, appear firmly rooted in an old timey bluegrass world. And they do work up a sweat when they play a mandolin breakdown like "TRAILS". But it's the inventive arrangements that continuously surprise as they dust out the folk-rock side of the exciting "Someone Toss", or David Gray's introspective "Williams". It adds up to imaginative music from a band that transcend any obvious expectations. **BP**



KATE RUSBY

ANGELS & MEN ★★★★★

WWW.KATERUSBY.COM

Dwarfed by an enormous pair of wings, Rusby looks strangely serene on her CD sleeve, a shame because, as fellow albums go, this one is a cut above the contenders. Of course, if you're going to handle a bunch of "old chestnuts" like "Deck The Halls" and "Let It Snow", then being blessed with a sparkling voice like hers is always a distinct advantage. But it's the unexpected twists and turns, and producer Damien O'Keefe's arrangements that will intrigue, the joyful take of Richard Thompson's dear "We'll Sing Hallelujah", Ron Block adding banjo to "Santa Never Brings Me A Bang" introduced by a sample of Kate's daughter, and the ethereal grandeur of "Paradise". **BP**



BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE

MEDICINE SONGS ★★☆☆

WWW.BUFFYSAINTE-MARIE.COM

If you remember Dinosaur then it's odd as you'll have heard "The Unincorporated" written by Buffy Sainte-Marie, it's more than 50 years since the lady first erupted onto the scene, and her anti-war songs and battles against the American government for despoiling Indian lands — Buffy was born a Cree — left no one in doubt that she was one tough cookie. And now she's back, the power of her rhetoric undimmed, taking a swipe at "billions of babies" Bush and Saddam on "The War Racket", and laying it on the line for the Indians with the pitiful tale of "Buy My Heart At Wounded Knee". Pulling no punches, she still fights her corner with a fire that's impossible to ignore and totally beautiful. Watch out Donald! **BP**



ROSS AINSLIE

SANCTUARY ★★★★★

WWW.ROSSAINSLIE.COM

Ross Ainslie is a Scottish piper who began playing at the tender age of eight, which probably explains why his virtuosity on this album is simply stunning. Apparently taking inspiration from Mike Oldfield's "Tubular Bells", Ross's concept is that the tracks should be allowed to segue into one another. The result is a musical journey that is really quite extraordinary. From the glorious "Summings", his whistle floating over soft falling ambient loops, with master Indian musicians Zakir Hussain on tabla and Shankar Datta's driving sarod, the music emerges from one arena of subtle beauty to the next, creating one enchantment and wonderment in almost equal measure. **BP**