

RECORD REVIEWS

Ray Johnston Band No Bad Days Self-released

THE RAY JOHNSTON BAND'S NEW *No Bad Days* is Texas country-rock bar music splattered with many of the subgenre's clichés, apparently written to please the young drinking crowd; for what it is, it's done well with plenty of fiddle, guitar, bass, drums, and other stuff from a bunch of fine studio musicians. Don't overlook the occasional "hey" or "who" tossed in.

The first single, "More Crown than Coke," suggests the need for "a little more fire and less smoke, a little more cash than broke, a little more high than low, etc.," workin' on a buzz.

We're gonna have a good time at the honky-tonk. We'll float down the Guadalupe. There's a fire burning in her eyes that he could get used to. Small town values. The Hill Country and a beat up ol' pickup on the open road with Merle on the radio. Memories of first love. A farmer prayin' for rain. A woman who's like Mexico and Telluride, a treasure worth her weight in gold. We get the picture.

What may be the best line on the CD as he rides with her right beside him listening to "Merle on the radio singin' all the words we didn't know."

Produced by **Erik Herbst** at Panhandle House in Denton, Johnston's vocals are accompanied by **Milo Deering**, **Dan Wojoehoeski**, **David DeShazo** (bass), **John Carroll** (electric guitar), **Rocky Gribble** (acoustic guitar, banjo), **Bradley Knight** (organ, piano), **Drew Womack** (harmonica), **Amy** and **April Rankin** (harmony vocals), and **Quentin Noble** (guitar).

—TOM GEDDIE

Shawn Nelson The Devil's River Fonky Tonk Music

IN HIS MIX OF MOODY, ATMOSPHERIC and sometimes upbeat offerings on *The Devil's River*, **Shawn Nelson** waits until the last song, "At

Barton Springs," to tell us, "The chances we take is the life we make." That should be common wisdom, although we seldom seem to think of it. At least not consciously.

The 11 songs on Nelson's sixth album take listeners thoughtfully through love and lost love, honky-tonks and hard times, thoughts drunken desperados and chili and tacos, a little whiskey in the coffee cup, working life far from home, of mortality, and more.

On the opening, title song, Nelson's somewhat rough country voice vaguely reminds of Waylon Jennings as he tells the tale of a man who's apparently near the end of his run.

"Tighten Up" is an old-style sounding honky-tonk song with "blood, sweat, and whiskey on the guitar strings."

On the Spanish-flavored "Medina," a man working in the oil fields yearns for the life he knew in his hometown.

The upbeat honky-tonk gospel "Deliver Me" is the lament of a man who can't seem to get it right.

Nelson gets it right here. He wrote all of the songs including one co-write each with **Will Dupuy** and **Fletcher Murchison**. Dupuy adds upright bass and harmonica and Murchison mandolin. The other musicians are **Wayne Sutton** (lead guitar), **Noah Jeffries** (fiddle), **Patrick Herzfeld** (drums and piano), **Morgan Thompson** (bass), **Matt Lara** (accordion), and **Bill Terry** (steel).

—TOM GEDDIE

Sour Bridges Sour Bridges Self-released

SOUR BRIDGES' SELF-TITLED THIRD album is roots music, free from the soil but not the tradition. If that makes any sense. It's a solid album, especially instrumentally, of 10 songs that seem a lot more fun to play than they would be to live. The band calls its music folk, bluegrass, and browngrass, a word that they define as a little dirtier than bluegrass.

The vocal blends are interesting in their semi-roughness, which often has more soul than "perfect" harmonies, whatever that might be.

Sour Bridges is **Bill Pucci** (vocals, banjo, guitar), **Matt Pucci** (vocals, mandolin, lead guitar), **Kat Wilkes** (fiddle), **Dalton Chamblee** (drums), **Jack Bridges** (vocals, bass guitar), and **Ben Morgan** (keyboards). Joining them in the studio were **Sam Berniard** (trumpet), **Fat Aaron** (electric guitar), **Garrett Ross** and **Travis Kennedy** (percussion), and **Tony Rogers** (cello).

The album deals with hard-working men, time taking its toll, the inevitable songs about love and about lost love, and more.

One favorite is "Dirt Poor" with its clean, crisp mountain sound about a man coming home from his night shift to find that she's changed the locks on his front door.

"Meet You There" is one man's hoped for solution to feeling alone.

"Cocaine Lorraine" kicks off the album with its long, enjoyable instrumental introduction.

My one concern about the album: is it my job to let myself be focused, or the music's job to focus me? The truth is: surely a bit of both. While I listened, I found my mind wandering into places that had nothing — at least on the surface — to do with any of the songs. I'll accept responsibility that it's probably my own fault in this case because there was only one song I didn't enjoy.

—TOM GEDDIE

Rahim Quazi Ghost Hunting Poppyfieldredmusic

RAHIM QUAZI HAS GONE *GHOST Hunting* in a red field of poppies, sharing sometimes poetic lyrics that often deal with the confusion of relationships. With its nicely played, interesting arrangements, call it pop with, intended or not, a **Beatles** influence.

On the image-filled "Tiny Flowers: 'there's a house where flowers tremble and the nights are so long and dark . . . daisies run down the hall . . . only to find refuge in a bed in a room . . . take this love and understand . . .'"

On "She Left Me," "I was the trip before the fall." From "Born on a Sunday," he learned to walk in the steep hills, and "falling down (was) my first thrill, all along you beside me with your arms reached out."

From the title song: if I could touch you now, what would I feel, I know you're real, I know you are watching me, what do you see?"

Oh, and about that Beatles influence I hear from time to time. Quazi says he fell in love with the Beatles as a child in Germany where his civilian father worked for the American military. One of the first songs he sang as a child — with his brother — in front of a home audience was "Yesterday (all my troubles seemed so far away)."

Quazi, a longtime fixture on the Dallas music scene, adds piano and other keyboards, guitar, percussion, and backing vocals, joined in the studio by 13 more musicians.

—TOM GEDDIE

THE FRIENDS OF THE TRANSPecos KID!



POOR DAVID'S PUB SUNDAY JULY 12th 4:00 PM-10:00 PM SILENT AUCTION • LIVE MUSIC • TRANSPecos MERCH

Poor Davids Pub in Dallas will be hosting a Blues Extravaganza for Texas Music fixture Mark Pollock. From sideman to Freddy King, Lowell Fulson and James Cotton to owner of Charley's Guitar Shop, the Guitar Show and Transpecos Guitars in Alpine, Mark has impacted audiences and guitarists throughout the Lone Star State!

The Blues Spectacular will allow Musicians to show their appreciation to Mark and help defray his medical expenses. Stephen Michael Dean will MC the show. Donations for the silent auction are coming in! Work from Frank X. Tolbert, Pat Foss, Bill Crump, George Toomer, Frank Helsey, and others will be there. The Midnighters, Ted Roddy, Mark Hickman and David Watson with Dylan Bishop, Reo Casey will do Midnighters songs. Special guest performances by KM Williams, Eddie Stout, Cadillac Johnson, Ray Reed, Jerry Clark, Douglas Edward Leslie, Roger Privitt, David Vincent, Billy Bucher, Jim Suhler, David Gonzalez and a HOST of others. There will also be a raffle and you can make donations too.

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AMERICANA TEXAS

By Tom
Geddie

AS THE PROMISE OF YOUTH. As opposed to, I suppose, the promises of youth. A CD I got in yesterday's mail has this laughing blonde on the cover, the single word *Abbey* across the bottom in all caps.

I set the CD aside and went back to writing the Great American Novel. You creative types know how that goes: 1. Check in on Facebook to see what I missed in the past hour. 2. Check *weather.com* for the latest forecast. 3. Think about what I'm going to write. 4. Get a drink of water. 4. Think some more about what I'm going to write. 5. Glance out the window at the cardinals chasing each other across the yard. 6. Write a sentence that turns into a paragraph. 7. Wonder about that CD that came in the mail. 8. Start a new chapter, but I'm not sure — right now — about what to say about the two youthful lead characters, who seem so diametrically different from one another.

So I take a break. Inspiration will come. If it doesn't soon, I'll start inking some random thoughts on the yellow legal pad — the one with "Surprise Myself" already written across the top. Synopses will surely spark. Connections will be made. And before I know it I'll be deep into the next chapter.

I think about the new CD. This *Abbey* sure does look young. And happy. I'll listen to the CD instead of writing.

Until I listen to the whole album, I never look at the news releases that come with the CDs.

On the opening song, "Southern Charm," a co-write by *Abbey* — Cone's her last name — and Amanda Williams. *Abbey's* young country voice is marvelously inviting, resonating with what seems like powerful restraint and the occasional ache

of love. The song about being in some guy's loving arms is fine enough.

The rest of the songs — all *Abbey* co-writes except for the closing "Concrete Rose" by Heather Morgan, Mallery Hope, and Ross Copperman — are consistently good.

The news release I finally read tells me that *Abbey* "has already won the admiration and support from some of the most influential names in Texas music" and that it's "quickly become well received by the esteemed music community in Nashville as well."

Often, news releases should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. But this girl is good.

I've never heard of her.

Which doesn't mean a darn thing. She's 16. She's from Argyle. There are 16 songs — a coincidence? — on the album. The music's well done. There are some familiar names among the musicians: Milo Deering on violin and fiddle (listed separately), viola, Dobro, and mandolin; Rocky Gribble on acoustic guitar, classical guitar, and banjo; Casey Rivers on background vocals. Gribble and Curtis Jones produced the acoustic album.

There's a commercial slickness — that's the feeling I get — to the whole package. The news release tells me *Abbey* is finalizing plans for her "What Does Music Mean to You?" initiative that begins this fall and will surely draw fans to her website. The stated purpose is for middle school students to send her videos telling her "their story of music." *Abbey* will choose winners from each school; from the school winners, one final winner will get an autographed acoustic guitar "and a slew of merchandise from *Abbey's* stash." Oh, and if enough submissions come from a single school, *Abbey* will perform a private concert just for that school,

which might win a drawing for \$1,000 for its music department.

It's most likely a fine marketing idea.

Commercial slickness or not, the singing and songs themselves are not commercial "sickness." The sound is real. So is the promise.

The news release tells us that *Abbey* is "an artist's artist, full of Texas pride, and completely comfortable being clay on the potter's wheel through her artistic and very promising trek forward." Ultimately on this music journey, it's not about letting people into their world. It's about people letting me into theirs through my music," she said. And, on the inside cover of the CD, *Abbey* tells us, "I've come to realize that I am and will always be on an endless journey to find what feeds my soul and makes my heart sing."

Every one of us is influenced by whose music we hear, whose words we hear or read, who's good to us, who's bad to us, and sometimes by who's indifferent to us. This isn't — or shouldn't be — as passive as clay on a potter's wheel. It's a growth thing. A natural progression that each of us resists or embraces in our own way. Until we become our own clay on our own potter's wheel.

Abbey Cone: The next big thing? The promise of youth, or at least one of them? Nobody really knows. Maybe. Bottom line. I'm years beyond middle school. I like the songs, almost every one of them. I like the way she sings. According to her website, the next chance to hear her live is July 19 at Filthy McNasty's in Fort Worth. It's a benefit concert — from 2 p.m. until midnight — for The Hope Center for Autism.

Now. Back to my own Great American Life. Uh, Great American Novel. ■