

BRENDA and the Reviews

Dix Bruce & Julie Cline: Look At It Rain

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Song List: Little Birdie, Making Believe, Take This Hammer, I Get Blue, There's More Pretty Girls Than One, Fair and Tender Ladies, Shady Grove, Darling Will You Ever Think of Me? Look At It Rain, The Banks of the Ohio, Just Someone I Used To Know, Pretty Polly, Frogs for Snakes, I Am a Pilgrim, Where the Soul Never Dies.

Dix Bruce has been active in the Bay Area music scene since the 1970s. His numerous instructional materials books and recordings with Mel Bay publications have taught many students how to play mandolin and guitar and his popular Parking Lot Pickers series has been a great reference book for bluegrass singers and musicians. Julie Cline is an acclaimed ceramicist but her musical talents will certainly be heralded from now on.

Dix and Julie Cline have assembled a fine selection of original and well-loved Americana songs. Their smooth vocal harmonies soar above a guitar and mandolin backdrop. "Shady Grove" is given a makeover with both a modal folk-style section and an uptempo bluegrass version. "Fair and Tender Ladies" features Julie's lead vocal and the warnings mentioned in the song are still worth heeding. "I Get Blue" is a Dix Bruce original and the bouncy rhythm underscores the singer's frustration with his lover. "Look At It Rain" is another Dix original and the duo's bouncy harmony is matched by a rolling guitar rhythm and mandolin punctuation. Dix's smooth guitar playing and Julie's seamless flow from solo to rhythm mandolin are showcased in a crosspicked version of "Banks of the Ohio." Dix and Julie perform an energizing two-mandolin accompaniment in their version of the classic murder ballad "Pretty Polly." Dix's instrumental "Frogs and Snakes" is given a bluesy, rough-edged treatment that just sets a perfect groove. The album ends all-too-soon with

a rendition of "Where The Soul of Man Never Dies" graced by their counter melody harmonies.

Some singers have a perfect symmetry in their voices and a gentle balance in their instrumental skills; Dix and Julie have a magical blend that will invite repeated listenings and joyous sing-a-longs from their listeners.

The Creak: Here, Hold This
www.thecreak.net
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Song list: Stuck in the Mission, Do What You're Feeling, My Johnny Lee, I'll Be gone, A Table For One, Carolina, Fool's Gold, No Vacancy, Old Dominion, Let It Rain, This Weekend, Mom.

In the 60s San Francisco was a wellspring of talented rock bands such as the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane, and these days there are many exciting bands that blend rock, blues, and bluegrass with urban sensibility to make an exciting contemporary bluegrass. The Creak won the Emerging Artists award at the 2012 Bluegrass in the Foothills festival, and this album showcases the exciting energy, creative artistry and ear-catching songs that made this group a winner.

The band members are Ryan Lim on bass and vocals, Chris Underwood on banjo, guitar, dobro and cello, Joe Readel on vocals and guitar, Korey Kassir on mandolin and vocals and Joe Boone on guitars. The band's hard-driving pulse is an exciting blend of bluegrass stomp and rock precision and the music is sure to get your feet moving. The band's vocal harmonies are smooth and closer to classic rock and roll. The opening song, "Stuck in the Mission," is an upbeat song with the soles of the shoes, and it's followed by the advice to "do what you're feeling, not what they think you ought to." "Johnny Lee" is in the vein of a "Boy Named Sue" and the muscular vocal delivery is matched with strong fiddle and guitar passages. "I'll Be Gone" is one of those gotta-get-out-of-this-mess songs with a

classic one liner – you're about as special as a worn out pair of shoes. The wry comments continue with a lover's last words – kissing you is like chugging gasoline. The mismatched love affairs continue in "Carolina" with its delightful banjo-flavored slow rock rhythms and harmonies.

More commentary on financial ups and down is filled with wry observations and the listener will delight in the humor. The eye-catching album cover art features movie set scenes and our heroes are riding to the rescue!

Steeldrivers: Hammer Down
Rounder Records
www.rounder.com
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Song list: Shallow Grave, How Long Have I Been Your Fool, When You Don't Come Home, I'll Be There, Burnin' the Woodshed Down, Wearin' A Hole, Lonesome Goodbye, Hell on Wheels, Cry No Mississippi, When I'm Gone.

With this third CD, the Steeldrivers once again put the pedal to the metal and present original songs with a powerful vocal presence and a fiddle and banjo driven sound. Lead vocalist Gary Nichols once again shows his ability to croon a softer ballad and then turn around and deliver a foot-stomping rant about the world. Anchoring the band's instrumental sound is Tammy Rogers on fiddle, Richard Bailey on banjo, Mike Fleming on bass and new member Brett Truitt on mandolin.

"Shallow Grave" leads off with Tammy's strong fiddle strokes as the band sings of a ghostly visit from a murdered lover. "How Long Have I Been Your Fool" showcases the band's vocal harmonies and the combined blending of the banjo and mandolin. "I'll Be There" is a soft love song and Gary delivers a heartfelt lead vocal. The fiddle and banjo create a tension behind the destructive act of "Burning the Woodshed Down." The honky tonk rhythm of "Wearin' A Hole" is a revisit to an old country style, and "Hell On

Wheels" kicks it up a notch with its tale of a lively lady.

So there you have it, another delightful musical venture from the Steeldrivers.

Monroe Crossing: The Road Has No End
5330 Northport Dr.
Brooklyn Center, MN 55429
www.monroecrossing.com

Song List: Cool Cool Ride, Chattanooga, Bullet Train, Hobos in the Roundhouse, Cicada, Rain Was Turning into Snow, Foggy River, Heavenly Table, Easy to Get Lost, If The World Were filled with You, Doing My Time, Bread and Milk, Last Letter Home, Long Cool Woman in a Black Dress.

Monroe Crossing has been actively making bluegrass music a vibrant reality in their home state of Minnesota. The band now has 13 albums and this latest one has a compelling combination of original songs and stellar instrumentation that provides a punchy rhythm pulse that makes all the songs intense bluegrass. Band members are Derek Johnson on guitar and vocals, Lisa Fuglie on fiddle and vocals, Matt Thompson on mandolin and vocals, David Robinson on banjo, resonophonic guitar and vocals, and Mark Anderson on bass and vocals. With strong and cohesive mandolin, banjo and fiddle and Lisa's strong vocals, the band has mastered its own version of Monroe tradition.

"Chattanooga" was written by Derek and it begins with rollicking banjo passage followed by fiddle underlying the lyrics celebrating the Tennessee town. The traveling theme continues with Lisa's "Bullet Train" coupled with banjo, fiddle and mandolin providing a high speed backdrop. The gentle "Hobos in the Roundhouse" is a salute to the kindhearted guard that let the hobos grab a few hours of sleep in the warm roundhouse. The instrumental "Cicada" has old-timey banjo matched with fiddle and Lisa's "Heavenly Table" has a virtual smorgasbord of delectable lyrics with cornbread and butter, hominy and okra, and red beans and bacon. The Flatt and Scruggs song, "Doing My Time," has a great interplay of banjo and fiddle, and the band pulls out all the stops for a bluegrass version of the Hollies song "Long Cool Woman in a Black Dress." Monroe Crossing has a winner with this lucky thirteenth album!

John Lowell: I Am Going to the West
www.JOHNLOWELL.COM
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Song List: Waterbound, Angus MacKenzie, Eight More Miles to Louisville, Lakes of Pontchartrain, Buffalo Skinners, Rhythm of the Wheels, Am I Not Enough, Mama Don't Like It, Sarah Hogan, Laura Foster, Where The Heart Is,



Brenda Hough

I Am Going to the West.

When you visualize Montana, you have images of intense contrast and saturated colors in skies, water and mountains. It seems fitting that John Lowell is a Montana musician, and his original songs have intense depth with contrasting vocals and guitar work that paint stories of folks that master challenges in man and nature.

John's warm baritone voice wraps itself around the lyrics and characters are the strong men and women of the western frontier. "Sarah Hogan's" love for an outlaw meets an untimely end as she rides into an ambush. The story of Tom Dooley and "Laura Foster" is retold with true murderer confessing on her deathbed. The hard life of a traveling musician is detailed in the love song for home and family "Where The Heart Is." The evocative "I Am Going to the West" has a powerful presentation with guitar and piano and could easily be the theme song of a pioneer in a Broadway musical.

John Lowell has written a fine collection of songs that capture the spirit of a very special time and place.

Various Artists: God Didn't Choose Sides – Civil War True Stories About Real People

Rural Rhythm Records
PO Box 730
Mt Juliet, TN 37121
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Song list: I'm Almost Home, Picture of Three Children, Legend of Jennie Wade, Christmas in Savannah, Providence Spring, Old John Burns, The Lady in Gray, Last Day At Vicksburg, Revel Hart, Carrie's Graveyard Book, The River Man, God Didn't Choose Sides, There Is A Fountain.

With the recent popularity of the movie Lincoln, there has been a renewed interest in the American Civil war. Sam Passamano and Rural Rhythm Records have gathered original songs about the individual soldiers and families that lived, sacrificed and triumphed during the many years of battle. Making the songs come to life are the talents of many top musicians: Marty Raybon, Steve Gully, Russell Moore,

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