

## EDGE CITY • KEEPERS OF THE FLAME

(Edge City \*\*\*\*)

Jim Patton & Sherry Brokus don't have major label glory days to look back on, but, like James Talley, they're driven by passion, the day jobs are what they do to fuel their real lives as musicians. Reviewing Chip Dolan's **Right Now** last month, I observed that the sideman credits on an album can show that the act knows its way round the scene, and while they don't perform often, Patton & Brokus sure know their musicians, which may be why it's taken five years for them to follow up their debut. The kind of talent with which they like to surround themselves doesn't come cheap, by Austin standards at least, Lloyd Maines, Bradley Kopp, David Webb, Glenn Fukunaga, Freddie Krc, Darcie Deaville, Jon Sanchez and Lorri Singer, you couldn't do much better for Edge City's literate brand of country-rock. Of course, these musos only assure that the album will sound good, not that'll be good, but **Keepers Of The Flame** is major leap forward from its often rather self-conscious predecessor, opening strong with the excellent, anthemic *Fortunate Man* and powering through 12 more solid originals written or cowritten by Patton without any of the occasional weak spots of **Mystery Ride**. Sometimes, the first album is a tough, even impossible, act to follow and the second (don't quite know why, but I loathe the expression 'sophomore effort') is a disappointment, but Edge City belong in the other class, for which the debut is a learning experience and the second has assurance, style and a keener appreciation of what works (and what doesn't). **JC**

## VA • AZALEA CITY SAMPLER 1

(Azalea City \*\*\*\*.5)

For a musicians' cooperative, 'Takoma Park's own record label,' founded by Grammy winning engineer Charlie Pilzer, puts out a very slick package. You can play this as a regular CD but plug it into your computer and you can access information about the artist whose track is playing, so I'm listening to the album, checking facts and writing this review, all at the same time, pretty neat (shoulda gone for the 17 inch screen though). If the Sampler is anything to go by, Takoma Park (Maryland) is home to a lot of female performers and folkies, especially fiddlers, in fact three of the label's ten acts are female folk fiddlers, Andrea Hoag, "one of the most respected performers of Swedish music in the US," Karen Collins (Cajun and country) and Loretta Kelly, "America's foremost player of the traditional Hardanger fiddle," while "power chamber-folk music" trio Moonfire includes yet another. David DiGiuseppe plays a variety of accordion musics, while Carey Creed, Rachel Cross, Mary Sue Twohy and Jesse Palidofsky are singer-songwriters with, finally, a familiar name to **3CM**, DC country band Ruthie & The Wranglers. The pick of the litter are Ruthie and her guys, of course, the quite remarkable and compelling Twohy, Creed and, rather surprisingly, Kelly, whose Norwegian instrumentals (everyone got two tracks by the way, except for Moonfire which plays a medley) are very engaging. I have no use whatsoever for Palidofsky, who openly admits to committing singalongs at live shows, or Cross, whose CD cover is so loathsome it's worth checking out, while the rest just ain't my cuppa. Pretty much par for the course with this kind of deal, but well worth it for Twohy, who's a real find. **JC**

## VA • GUITAR HOT SHOTS

(HighTone \*\*\*\*)

Some time ago, I had some harsh (but fair) words to say about *Rolling Stone's* footling 100 Greatest Guitarists Of All Time, which didn't even rank Andrés Segovia, Django Reinhardt, Charlie Christian, Sister Rosetta Tharpe or Wes Montgomery and should, realistically, have been titled '100 Greatest Arena Rock Electric Lead Guitarists Of *Rolling Stone* Editorial Staff's Lifetime Even If We're Mostly Too Young To Have Actually Seen Jimi Hendrix.' The basic flaw in such a list is that it compares not merely apples and oranges but every variety of fruit known to man and the folly of this approach is well illustrated by HighTone's vividly contrasted panorama. Though its back catalog has obvious limitations—the label's cut a wide swath through roots genres in its 22 years, but has never dabbled in jazz or classical—it can draw on a very varied cast of sensational guitar pickers, so much so that there enough MIAs for a second volume, for instance Bill Kirchen, JB Hutto, Jimmie Tarlton, Mississippi Fred McDowell, Sleepy John Estes, James Armstrong and Buddy Miller (I may not have much use for Miller overall, but he is a good guitarist). However, those who made the cut this time are The Morells' D Clinton Thompson, Redd Volkaert, Deke Dickerson, Dave Alvin, The Hellecasters' John Jorgenson, Jerry Donahue & Will Ray, Joe Louis Walker, Hot Club Of Cowtown's Whit Smith, Dave Biller & Jeremy Wakefield, The Domino Kings' Stevie Newman & Richie Rebuth, Dick Dale, Chris Smither, Otis Rush and Robert Cray. Roots rock, country, surf, blues, folk and Western swing side by side, just try and pick a Best out that lot. My favorite tracks are Alvin's live *White Cadillac*, The Domino Kings' *Give Me Some Kind Of Sign* and Smither's acoustic version of *Dust My Broom*, but if you asked me to rank these guys, I'd be stumped. Oh yes, and I do mean guys. I rather wish this included Jessie Mae Hemphill and/or Rosie Flores, both of whom recorded for Hightone. Even *Rolling Stone* managed to squeeze in two women, Joni Mitchell at #72 and Joan Jett (!) at #87. **JC**

## TROY CAMPBELL • LONG IN THE SUN

(M-Ray \*\*\*\*.5)

Round about the time *Music City* was launched, The Highwaymen arrived in Austin, from Dayton, OH, and while I loved the band, which later morphed into Loose Diamonds, it wasn't until the summer of 1990, when the lead singer was obliged, by the temporary loss of his drummer, to play acoustic gigs, that I realized what a truly outstanding songwriter he was. And still is. One of the problems with following artists over many years, in Campbell's case his entire recording career, is that one expects them always to reach the level of which one knows they're capable, and, using The Highwaymen's **Live Texas Radio**, which, when asked, at the end of the 90s, by the *Austin American-Statesman*, I named Austin Album of the Decade, as a yardstick, I've had to take exception to some of Loose Diamonds' and Campbell's own CDs (fortunately, he's almost the only Austin musician who can take criticism in stride, but that's a whole other issue). Not this time though. On his third solo album, produced by Gurf Morlix, who also plays everything but bass and drums, Campbell has done two things, come up with songs as consistently strong as those on **Live Texas Radio** and, equally important, found an authentic voice. Whether he was trying to distinguish his singer-songwriter and rock & roll personae, this time round he seems to have reconciled the two, and now sounds more like the impassioned frontman of The Highwaymen who once told me "I try to sing every song as if it was for the last time." To be honest, I thought at the time that he'd got there with 2003's **American Breakdown**, also produced by Morlix, after the odd false start of **Man Vs Beast** which sounded for all the world as if Campbell were auditioning producers, Triple A producers at that, but this album makes it sound transitional, for all its strengths just a stepping stone to an even more complete and accomplished integration of his remarkable talents as a singer and a songwriter. Reissuing **Live Texas Radio** on CD was one of the most satisfying things I've ever done (incidentally, still available from **3CM** for a very reasonable \$10 including p&p), and now I have a Campbell solo album, I hope the first of many, that meets the expectations it raised. **JC**

## CAROLINE AIKEN

### ARE WE THERE YET, MAMA?

(self \*\*\*\*)

During last summer (and fall and early winter), I tried writing a group review of four Austin female singer-songwriters, but the project bogged down because I could never remember whose CD I was listening to at any given moment, and it's hard to compare when you can't contrast. Girls with Guitars have three hurdles, two not gender-specific, being able to write good songs and, because competition has raised the bar so high, being able to play acoustic guitar rather more than adequately, but, on top of that, they have to be able to sing, hardly a factor for their male counterparts. Unfair I know, but Bobbie Zimmerman would have been dead in the water. Though Aiken, "one of the cornerstones of the Decatur folk movement," may well, for all I know, have broken out of the folk pack, she doesn't appear to have made much impression outside the folk ghetto, but this, her fifth CD, seems geared to a wider audience. She certainly has all the fixings, excellent songs, often stunning, if occasionally slightly florid on the slide, 12-string bluesy guitar playing, and dynamic and distinctive vocal stylings. With nine originals and songs by Walter Hyatt (the title track), the Georgia Sea Island Singers and, one of two live tracks, Joyce Kennedy of Georgia funk band Mother's Finest (there's also a cowrite with that group's guitarist Moses Mo) and others, and exemplary backing, Aiken repositions herself as a singer-songwriter to be reckoned with. **JC**

## TONY GILKYSON • GOODBYE GUITAR

(Rolling Sea \*\*\*\*)

Eight years ago, Gilkyson, best known as lead guitarist of X and Lone Justice, and—sorry, Tony, I'm Texas-based, I have to say this—Eliza's brother, released his first solo album, **Sparko**. I never heard it but, judging from Google, nobody much else did either, in fact, you can't even make out for sure whether or not it was an import. Basically, it sank without trace, which strongly suggests that it didn't light anyone's fire. I'm guessing Gilkyson learned from the experience because this time round he has the best publicist money can hire, distribution and a strong product. Though he's produced several albums, including a couple of Eliza's, he had Charlie McGovern and Don Heffington take charge of his own and they've done a quite sensational job of balancing his fabulous guitar work and fine singing with original songs that, well, let's just say that while he has great ideas, he doesn't see a problem with something like "and there's many more like me/all across this country" in what's otherwise a strong song about homelessness. Still, I'm more than willing to forgive occasional weaknesses in scansion for that gorgeous guitar tone and those silky chord progressions. Among the few covers are Woody Guthrie's *Old Cracked Looking Glass* and *Donut And A Dream*, by the late C Carson Parks, who was once in dad Terry Gilkyson's Easy Riders and whose brother, Van Dyke Parks, plays piano on it. **JC**