

...the new releases

down extremely well with Americana audiences. The organ playing by Sandra helps this song create an awesome sound, and is a tune which all involved should be very proud of. The shores of the British Isles will not contain this band for long, as worldwide fame will surely beckon for a group I hope to catch live in the near future something I urge all readers to try and do. **RH**
www.myspace.com/rantnraivesite

Ruth Moody THE GARDEN

Red House Records
★★★★☆
Moody waxes metaphorical in THE GARDEN



is Ruth Moody's (the Wailin' Jennys) debut full-length album. She released an EP titled BLUE MUSE back in 2002. Born in Australia, like her three siblings she is a classically trained musician, Ruth grew up on the Canadian prairies in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The album was recorded at Found Sound in Toronto and produced by David Travers-Smith (the Wailin' Jennys, Jane Siberry, Ani DeFranco). Moody recently told an interviewer from Spinner, the web site music magazine: 'I tend to write mostly from my own personal experience rather than narrative stories. I usually don't even think about it; I just start writing. Mostly it's not a brain thing but a heart thing.'

The lyrically metaphorical album title song launches the collection, and in the lines: 'Cradle me like a seed, As I lay in the garden,' Moody offers the promise of a fruitful future. Towards the close the lyric references gardens as places of: 'sweet mystery.' With snow covering the (Manitoba) prairies for over half the year, the lyrically seductive *Cold Outside* hints at a warm welcome and more in the repeated: 'I think I know how to love you, I think you know that I want to.' The male-female conundrum is further explored in *Never Said Goodbye*, *Winter Waltz* and the beautifully wistful *Valentine*.

On THE GARDEN Moody is supported vocally by fellow Jenny's, Heather Masse and Nicky Mehta, plus Oh Susanna. Among a vast coterie of session players Crooked Still contribute to the album title song, and the fiddle of Ruth's brother Richard (the Bills) can be heard on *Nest*. The typeface and artwork layout possesses an early twentieth century (sales catalogue) feel, while the front cover features thistles sprouting from what appears to be a very shapely vase. Look closer, the vase is corset shaped. What's that all about? **AW**
http://www.ruthmoody.com/

Steve Mayone LONG PLAY RECORD

Hi-N-Dry
★★★★
Veteran singer-songwriter delivers finely crafted set



A thirty-year, twenty album veteran, Massachusetts singer-songwriter Steve Mayone has honed his craft well over his lengthy career

and despite the unimaginative title this is not just another way marker on his long road. Mayone is one of that dying breed, a craftsman, which means that every song here is perfectly put together: not in a slick soulless way but in a get everything to fit right and the rest will take care of itself one.

On balance Mayone succeeds but, despite the supreme listenability of all the songs you do have to get past a hat trick of hurdles. First is the fact that his voice sounds remarkably like late period John Lennon, and he doesn't do himself any favours by over-emphasising this from time to time via arrangements and phrasings—think Jeff Lynne on *Free As A Bird*—and opener *Everyone's Insane* and the subsequent three songs are the worst offenders. Second up is a certain 1970s over-smoothness about the sound in general, which jars a little in an era when we expect a bit more grit, while last but by no means least there are more than a few cases of rather obvious lyrics and rhymes.

However, despite those caveats there's some fine music here. On *High Lonesome* Mayone lets himself be himself and the result is a classic mournful country lament with a beautifully aching chorus. *Long Way To Heaven's* wistful regret and *Blue Sun's* simplicity are not far behind in the quality stakes while *Secret Garden* picks things up with a nice staccato beat and a bit more volume and comparing closer *Adrift* (more regret) to Jimmy Webb is not a stretch. So on balance a result, a solid home win from, if not currently a Premiership performer, certainly a play-off contender in the Championship. **JS**
www.stevemayone.com

Slowman I'M BACK

Slow Records
★★★★☆

Svante Törngren aka Slowman has released his second album I'M BACK, consisting of eleven original songs. Svante, known as Slowman took the name due to the fact it took him some twenty years to compose an album of his own. Covering a varied field of blues, rock, alt.country and Americana, Slowman should be recognised as a talented musician and songwriter, straying from his comfort zone, creating an exciting thrill of a journey for his dedicated fans. *Southside* is an upbeat guitar slick track, with talented fellow musicians joining Slowman on his material, creating a sound overflowing with blues funk. Title track *I'm Back* and the duet with Sheraye *Roses & Wine* are set to be released as future singles, and hopefully they will gain recognition at BBC Radio Two. *Roses & Wine* features Sheraye's clear and strong vocals that harmonise with Slowman superbly. However, this does not strike out as the best song from the album in comparison to the sublime *The Silent Years*. Slick, cool and dirty, *The Silent Years* shows Slowman singing with his heart on his sleeve,



The Chieftains featuring Ry Cooder

SAN PATRICIO
Concord Records

★★★★☆

Sprawling, ambitious concept album evokes a landscape of ghosts

The San Patricio battalion, mostly Irish, mostly Catholic, fought as part of the US Army in its 1846 war with Mexico before switching sides and fighting on the other side of the Rio Grande, helping to stem the tide of the American land-grab, finding themselves killed in battle or surviving to be hanged as traitors. It's a story that still represents a dark and uncomfortable chapter in American history, though these men are folk heroes in Mexico.

The San Patricios represent a larger concept of historical recollection and human memory. They are also the effective lynchpin around which the Chieftains' Paddy Moloney has formed his latest—and most complex, most beautiful—exploration of the extent to which Gaelic roots run throughout the world's musical landscape. Here is a record of Irish-Mexicana fusion, a daunting work that finds mariachi played in jig time, bodhráns trading fills with horns, two musical heritages blurring until their roots are indistinguishable from one another's. Through the music the huge roster of talent conscripted by Moloney and long-time cohort Cooder are able to paint a vivid picture of the commonality of human experience, and to produce something that is both fiercely intelligent and deeply moving. And through the story of the San Patricios, wider themes of cruelty, devastation and bravery are suggested, but so too are the more immediate themes of life and living.

As for the Patricios themselves, their story is recounted with a stately, somewhat removed sense of elegy balanced elsewhere by less specific songs imbued with enough passion and drive to make the listener's blood run hot. This dual approach serves to acknowledge the men of the title without descending into dry stoicism or elevating them with clichéd heroism. It's a sensitive and appropriate means to explore the record's themes, as celebrating the Patricios too fiercely would perhaps prove crass and gratuitous. Instead, life is celebrated, rather than any one group of lives, even if that celebration is tempered by a mournful enormity of sadness.

Songs alternate between rich jams on a common world musicality, styles meshing and clashing in unpredictable ways, some thrilling, some slightly awkward, and more focussed concept pieces given to sober reflection. Cooder lends his spare vocals to *The Sands of Mexico*, a powerful border ballad recounting a soldier's loss of faith in everything but his bible. Liam Neeson has an unexpected cameo, narrating the Patricios' plight over a stirring marching hymn, followed immediately by Moya Brennan's *Lullaby for the Dead*, a resolutely Irish piece that tempts sentimentality but proves heartbreaking.

SAN PATRICIO packs a massive amount into its short one hour. There is so much here to love, to admire, to read into. Everyone involved has contributed to something wonderful, something far larger than the sum of its parts. Themes and concepts sometimes prove a little too grand to be satisfyingly encapsulated, but even if the album buckles a little under the weight of its own ambition, it still manages to hold up its head and walk tall. **AlexC**
www.thechieftains.com



playing a moody tune creating a great effect, making this one of the highlights from the album. I'M BACK is a brilliant second album to come from an all round musician and songwriter. Hopefully, we won't have to wait a further twenty years for a third release! **CB**
www.slowman.se

Songdog A LIFE ERODING

One Little Indian
tplp1057cd

★★★★

Welsh woe in epic proportions

Welsh folksters Songdog have received much acclaim for their dark storytelling. Having picked up more than a handful of famous fans (including Bruce Springsteen) since 2005's THE TIME OF SUMMER LIGHTNING, the collective continue in a similar fashion on latest release A LIFE ERODING. Singer-songwriter Lyndon Morgans may have an enviable life (not only is he a celebrated songwriter, but an award-winning playwright), but he still excels at expressing the sorrowful and depressing. Ever the songwriting



Jim Cartwright, Lyndon is at his peak when wearily witty.

A LIFE ERODING gets off to a grand start. The aching *A Life Eroding (So Much Sorrow)* is radio friendly without ever losing the essence of Songdog's sinister sound. Moving oddly into a Tom Jones Delilah-inspired *Obediah's Waltz*, Lyndon's vocal is richer in sound than elsewhere on the record. Gene Autry's *Ghost* is hauntingly harrowing whilst 3.30 am (Small Talk) is upbeat enough to get the shoulders swaying. 1979 and Elaine take us amiably to the halfway point. Thereafter life does truly erode as Songdog's efforts take a tumble. Losing the comical balance, Songdog appear to be making too much effort. Particularly disappointing is *I Got Drunk And Wrote You A Poem*. Lyrically unenlightened, Lyndon sounds as if he has given in. *An Old Man's Love* appears initially to offer redemption before growing equally tired.

A LIFE ERODING is most definitely an album of two distinct halves. Earth-shattering beautiful for the first half, Songdog seem to run out of steam as the album draws to a close. **JW**
www.songdog.co.uk