

1960s, Martin's *Midwest Farm Disaster* focuses on the large tracts of deserted and un-worked prairie land following the passing of the land owner, or as a result of that hot issue—bank foreclosure. While the latter tune tackles a grim reality, drawn from the same recording the ensuing *Old Rass* focuses on inebriation with a deal of lyrical humour. Rasputin T. Van Jones aka *Old Rass* was grandpa's 'old watch-eyed horse,' the one that would transport him home following a night of 'drinkin' liquor from a puddle on the floor.'

One of Lowell's best known sons was celebrated writer Jack Kerouac (1922–1969), having recalled the instance when Bob, aged 21, almost spoke to his hero, he performs the new song *Jack Kerouac*. Like *Old Rass*, the ensuing *Two Half Sisters*—another new song—also mentions the imbibing of copious amounts of alcohol, while from THE RIVER TURNS THE WHEEL Bob reprises his already familiar Stella Kerouac—Jack's third wife. *Fat Rat's Ass* another previously unrecorded (and humorous) Martin original follows, replete with an attitude filled, devil may care lyric. *The River Turns The Wheel* is preceded by the audience participation song Let Freedom Ring (a contemporary song of social conscience from Bob's Y2K release NEXT TO NOTHIN'). Bob Martin is, and always has been, a quality songwriter. **Arthur Wood**
<http://www.riversong.com/>

Brian Ray
THIS WAY UP
Whoaray Records
WR-05002
★★★★☆
A majestic release
worth seeking out



Born and raised in Los Angeles and a member of Paul McCartney's band as his guitarist and bassist since 2002, Brian Ray is someone who I should know about, but unfortunately his music has passed me by. Thankfully, after the release of this record, which consists of eleven songs, I shall never forget the name of Brian Ray.

There were many tracks here which made me want to see McCartney live just so I could see Brian playing his licks which are exquisitely done throughout this record. But if I had to pick one track in particular, it would have to be *Very Happy Song*. Like its title suggests, it is a tune which raises the spirit and makes you grin a Cheshire Cat-style smile. The opening song, *Happy Ending*, also deserves recognition. The initial beginning sounds as though it is a forgotten Bond theme tune and although it is a tad pop at times it is a damn fine example of someone playing his heart out and producing an excellent tune at the same time. The former Beatle sure knows how to pick one of the best guitarists around to help him out on tour. This album is that good it would be foolish not to predict a follow-up.

Russell Hill
www.brianray.com

Cowboy Junkies
DEMONS
Proper Records
PRPCD076

★★★★
Fine tribute to the late Vic Chesnutt

Vic Chesnutt touched a lot of lives with his unique, wounded tales of solitude and anguish. Among them were Canadian band the Cowboy Junkies. Chesnutt appeared on the revamp of their debut album THE TRINITY SESSIONS and there were plans afoot for the band to record an album with him. Sadly, this was not to be, but it is a measure of their high estimation for him that for this second release in their Nomad series they pay tribute to him with a collection of covers.

Sharing a dolorous and indeed almost devotional sound with Chesnutt's recordings the Canadians are well placed to adapt his songs with Margo Timmins' deadpan delivery floating over some superb arrangements of his songs. The opening song *Wrong Piano* doesn't bode well for the remainder of the album. Cluttered with chunks of guitar and a heavy drum sound there is no sense of the clarity that Chesnutt achieved but other muscular workouts such as the Crazy Horse like delivery of *Ladle* or the organ driven swirlings of *Strange Language* are more successful. However it is in the sparser renderings of songs that the band excel. *Square Room* is an excellent, middle European tinged lament reminiscent of the Walkabouts while *West of Rome* is spooky, harking back to the debut Trinity album. *Supernatural* is a gift, an ethereal glimpse with mandolin and violin creating an otherworldly sound.

While recognisably a Cowboy Junkies album there is a sense that a previous tribute album, SWEET RELIEF II: GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION cleaved more to Chesnutt's musical vision but there is no doubting the sincerity on show here. The final song *When the Bottom Fell Out* uses dialogue from Chesnutt himself which belays the (post mortem) sense of him as a tortured soul with some banter at a house gig reminding the listener that the man had a sense of humour that served him until the well ran dry. **Paul Kerr**
<http://latentrecordings.com/cowboyjunkies/>

Drunken Balordi
DRUNKEN BALORDI
Filthy Dog Records
★★★★

Whatever this band is on put me down for a subscription

With their line-up consisting of musicians from Italy, South Africa, Ireland and New Zealand, this London-based band made their debut less than two years ago but I'm sure many have found that their style of music (which is a combination of gypsy folk mixed with the music of the Pogues but performed as though all members of the band are



on some kind of narcotics) to be sublime. The band has spent a large part of their time since their formation playing to crowds around Europe and the USA.

All four members contribute towards an earth-shattering sound which is truly stonking. *Italian Nightmare* includes some rousing instrumental accompaniment and is a tune which is hard not to dislike. The same can be said about *Juda Ballerina*. Passionately sung, the instrumentation again allow for the lead singing to shine. If you ever see a gig listing for this band near you, it would certainly be worth your while to check them out as such an occasion would be ridiculous to miss. **Russell Hill**
www.drunkenbalordi.com

James Findlay
SPORT AND PLAY
Fellside Recordings
FEC238

★★★★
Clear, from this, why



he won BBC Radio 2 Young Folk Award

Fast becoming the 'British' version of America's Green Linnet record company the astute Paul Adams catches yet another rising 'folk-star' for his ever burgeoning roster of excellence. In 2009 James Findlay won the prestigious BBC Radio 2 Young Folk Award and rightly so on the strength of this recording. Let's not beat about the bush here, Findlay's vocal approach may not be to everyone's taste but striking it is, particularly if you happen to like your folk music a little bit...shall we say 'idiosyncratic'. By definition, the mere mention of the words 'folk singer' conjures for many a picture of a wizened old geezer propping up the bar in a local hostelry brandishing a pewter tankard and with his finger firmly stuck in his ear whilst bellowing out the 'hits' of yesterday. I'm pleased to say that in this case we can forego that scenario and be thankful that the youth of today are quite happy to delve into the back catalogue of the dusty Child ballads as did the likes of

Greg Trooper
UPSIDE-DOWN TOWN

52 Shakes Records
★★★★☆

UPSIDE-DOWN TOWN rings the musical changes with aplomb, They Call Me Hank simply sparkles

Following a number of years sojourn in Nashville, New Jersey-bred Greg Trooper is back home in New York—the Queens neighbourhood of Rockaway Beach to be precise. A fan-fund recording, production of UPSIDE-DOWN TOWN is credited to Trooper, the talented Stewart Lerman—owner of the Shine Box Studio which is now located in Hoboken—and keyboard wizard Kevin McKendree (Delbert McClinton). Additional recording took place at Upstairs in Rockaway Park and the Rock House, the latter being McKendree's Franklin, Tennessee studio. Apart from Lerman (bass, organ, percussion) and McKendree (keyboards, guitars), Trooper is supported by his long-time 'back-line compadres' Kenneth Blevins (drums) and Dave Jacques (bass), there's a harmony vocal by Claire 'Ireland' Mullally on the ballad *First True Love*, and their teenage son Jack (drums, djembe) contributes to three of the album's twelve selections.

Trooper loves to inject soul into the musical proceedings and replete with assistance from Kevin's swirling B3 organ that's true of the uptempo opening song *Nobody In The Whole Wide World*—the sad tale of a now strained relationship. The diamond (read masterpiece) on UPSIDE-DOWN TOWN is without doubt *They Call Me Hank*, wherein the broken narrator lives life on a knife edge. Mention that 'I live by the river' and 'fish for whatever I can sell' brought to mind the central character in Cormac McCarthy's semi-autobiographical novel SUTTREE (1979). These days the book is an acknowledged masterpiece of late 20th century American literature, and on a day to day basis McCarthy's 'hero' Cornelius 'Buddy' Suttree, like Hank, wrestles with life's responsibilities and consumes too much alcohol in an attempt to numb the pain. In my book, *They Call Me Hank* is a definite contender for 2011 Song of the Year.

Love rears its head in the city inspired *Dreams Like This*—'Shelter from a Monday rain, Standing under elevated train'—and again in the lyrically optimistic, mid-paced *We've Still Got Time*. There's much reference to railway engines throughout the gospel flavoured *Might Be A Train*, and an iron-horse paced backbeat fuels the melody. Relative to (eventually) moving on 'to the great up yonder,' with a sly wink Trooper speculates 'Maybe six white horses with a golden chariot, But my guess is, it'll probably be a train.' Love founders in the soulful *Could Have Been You*, the narrator of *Second Wind* is a weary heart-sore traveller, while his similarly disenchanted counterpart in album closer *Everything Will Be Just Fine* restructures his life by embracing optimism.

Greg is scheduled to tour the UK during early May. On the evidence of UPSIDE-DOWN TOWN that's a must-not-miss gig to mark on your calendar. **Arthur Wood**
<http://www.gregtrooper.com/>

Note: 'Shelter from a Monday rain, Standing under elevated train'—I've listened to this segment of lyric repeatedly, and that's what he sings. There's no lyric booklet, and the words are not posted on Greg's web site. You would think the second line should be 'Standing under an elevated train' but he doesn't say that.

