



INTERNATIONAL BLUEGRASS MUSIC ASSOCIATION

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Allerton & Alton; *Black, White and Bluegrass* (Bear Family Records, www.bear-family.de ^[2]) Al Hawkes and Alton Myers met in 1947 at a record store in Portland, Maine as teenagers. They ended up playing music together on an unlicensed radio station Al built in 1949. Billed as The Cumberland Ridge Runners, they appeared on WLAM in Lewiston, Me., which reached into Canada. This recording is a collection of their 15-minute, live radio shows. Allerton (Al) Hawkes and Alton Myers had one of the first known interracial duets in country music. Both returned from the Korean War in 1953, but the duo was about 20 years ahead of the time when fans could accept a white and African American "brother duet," so they stopped performing. Included: "Keep on the Sunny Side," "Kentucky," "Drifting Too Far from the Shore," "Cabin in Caroline" and more.

Jay Armsworthy, *I Couldn't Make it Without Him* (Blue Circle Records, www.easterntertraditionbluegrass.com ^[3]) Armsworthy's fourth CD and his first bluegrass gospel album on the Blue Circle Records label is a project he's been wanting to do since 1995. Jay is backed up by Wayne and Kristin Scott Benson, Greg Luck, Jason Moore, Don Rigsby and Aaron Till on a dozen songs written by Roy Acuff, Ruby Rakes & Carter Stanley, Tom T. & Dixie Hall and Troy Engle, Gary Ferguson and more. In liner notes Larry Sparks says, "This album gives some promise to bluegrass gospel that it will be taken care of in the future years to come by people like Jay Armsworthy."

Terry Baucom, *In a Groove* (www.terrybaucom.com ^[4])

After 30 years playing banjo in bands like Boone Creek, Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver, IIIrd Tyme Out, Blue Ridge, Amanda & Kenny Smith and Dale Ann Bradley, the "Duke of Drive" steps into the spotlight with his first solo album. Twelve cuts powered by Baucom's banjo feature Jamie Dailey; Lou Reid; Chris Stapleton; Ronnie Bowman; Russell Moore; Buddy Melton; Paul Williams; John Cowan; Adam Steffey; the original Quicksilver with Lawson, Reid and Jimmy Haley; and Cindy Baucom. The material comes from James Cody Shuler, Chris Stapleton, Connie Leigh, Buck Owens, The Louvin Brothers, Eddie Adcock, Jon Weisberger and Stephen Mougin, among others. .

Norman Blake, *Green Light on the Southern* (Plectrafone Records, Western Jubilee Recordings (www.westernjubilee.com ^[5]))

In liner notes guitar stylist Norman Blake says, "I've seen the rural music I've loved since childhood grow fainter and farther away in a commercial and urbanized society that seems to care little for the charms of old fashioned Southern string music and its long gone practitioners". Here are some of the old songs I play and sing around home; one can live by the sentiment and poetry found in many of them." In addition to the title track, Norman and Nancy Blake present "Little Bunch of Roses," "Railroading on the Great Divide," "The Wreck of the C&O," "Whistling Rufus," "Bandit Cole Younger" and more.

Louisa Branscomb, *I'll Take Love: From the Pen of Louisa Branscomb* (Compass Records, www.compassrecords.com [6], www.louisabranscomb.com [7])

Louisa Branscomb, who wrote the bluegrass standard, "Steel Rails," presents 13 new original songs performed by a "Who's Who" list of bluegrass singers and musicians. Claire Lynch presents "I'm Gonna Love You" and "Your Amazing Grace"; Steve Gullley and Dale Ann Bradley sing "Closin' Nashville Down," "Surrender," "Silence Broke Beyond Repair," "It's Just Lovin'" and the title cut (with Alison Krauss); and The Whites sing "This Side of Heaven" and "That's What Texas Was For;" plus more from Josh Williams, David Peterson, John Cowan, Becky Schlegel and an able cast of instrumentalists.

Michael Cleveland & Flamekeeper, *Fired Up* (Rounder, www.rounder.com [8])

In liner notes Matt Glaser says, "Michael Cleveland and Flamekeeper play every tune with a kind of life or death urgency; you feel like they're grabbing you by your collar and insisting that you listen to the most important message you will ever hear." The latest set of fiery bluegrass music from the Flamekeeper band includes songs written by band members Tom Adams, Jesse Brock, Marshall Wilborn and Jessie Baker, plus David McLaughlin, Tom T. Hall, Jimmy Martin, Buddy Spicher and more.

Bill Emerson, *Eclipse* (Rural Rhythm Records, www.ruralrhythm.com [9])

DC-based banjo stylist Bill Emerson is joined by Tom Adams, Marshall Wilborn, Lynn Morris, Jimmy Gaudreau and Janet Davis on his seventh solo album. The first single to radio, "Poor Rebel Soldier," features Adams on lead vocals. Marshall Wilborn and Lynn Morris sing "Jesse James," and Jenny Leigh Obert takes the lead on "Don't Come Back Around." Emerson wrote nine of the tunes himself. The instrumental, "New San Juan" is already getting radio airplay.

The Farewell Drifters, *Echo Boom* (Heart Squeeze Records, www.thefarewelldrifters.com [10])

The latest album of original music from the Nashville-based Farewell Drifters was recorded live in the studio with no overdubs. The title comes from a reference to their 20-something generation being the children of the Baby Boomers. "Inspired by our parents' music, we are creating our own," they explain in liner notes. Included: "Punchline," "Tip of the Iceberg," "Heart of a Slave," "A Bed of My Own," "Words," "Common Ties" and more.

Farm Country Jubilee, *A Bluegrass Tribute to Historic RCA Studio B* (

www.farmcountry.com [11]) The debut from Farm Country Jubilee, includes music from Charlie Rich, Don Gibson, John Hartford, Harlan Howard, Jack Clement, Port Wagoner, Boudleaux & Felice Bryant and Chet Atkins, among others. Starring Daryl Mosley, Tim Graves and Stacy Scruggs, FCJ is a musical act, a stage show and an entertainment concept with the goal of "rediscovering the elements that transformed country music from a regional pastime into a worldwide cultural treasure," band members say. New weekly shows (with equal doses of traditional country, bluegrass and comedy) are posted at www.farmcountry.com [11]

The Franz Family, *The Tale You'll Never Hear* (www.thefranzfamily.com [12])

The new album of (mostly) original bluegrass gospel music showcases the talents of the Franz Family: Randy, Ruth Ann, Caleb, Audra, Emmett and Olivia. Growing up onstage in Branson, Missouri, the younger band members have matured and honed their craft to present a unique bluegrass sound tinged with elements of jazzy blues and acoustic pop. Included: "Alone and Lost," "Somewhere in Glory," "Getting Ready to Go," "Isaiah's Lament," "Unorthodoxy" and more.

The Gibson Brothers, *Help My Brother* (Compass Records, www.compassrecords.com ^[6])
Two-time 2010 IBMA Award winners, Eric and Leigh Gibson present their 10th album of music. The title track written by Leigh explores the golden rule in a new light. The Chris Henry-penned "Walking West to Memphis" recounts the story of a roustabout who, down on his luck, realizes that the happiness he seeks will be found in the arms of his Memphis girl. The brothers also pay tribute to Jim & Jess and the Louvin Brothers with "I'll Love Nobody But You" and "He Can Be Found."

The Grascals, *Country Classics with a Bluegrass Spin* (BluGrascal Records, Cracker Barrel Old Country Store)
The seven-time #1 album on *Billboard's* Bluegrass Album chart distributed through the nation-wide chain of Cracker Barrel Old Country Store restaurants is a collection of 13 songs featuring vocal collaborations with guests from the country music world—many whom The Grascals have recorded and toured with in the past. Dolly Parton, Charlie Daniels, Tom T. Hall, Joe Nichols, Brad Paisley, Dierks Bentley, The Oak Ridge Boys, Darryl Worley, Terri Clark, Randy Owen and Steven Seagal. A percentage of proceeds from album sales go to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital to help fight childhood cancer—the place that inspired the Jamie Johnson/Susanne Mumpower Johnson/Jenee Fleenor original, "I Am Strong."

The Grascals, *Dance 'til Your Stockings are Hot and Ravelin? (A Tribute to the Music of The Andy Griffith Show)*, BluGrascal Records/ Saguaro Road Records, www.grascals.com ^[13]
In honor of the 50th anniversary of The Andy Griffith Show, two-time IBMA Entertainers of the Year, The Grascals, have released a seven-song EP of songs heard on the classic television series. They also throw in the "Mayberry's Finest" theme song and a band original, inspired by a Barney Fife line from the episode about a group of stray dogs: "Boy, Giraffes are Selfish."

Grasstowne, *Kickin' Up Dust* (Rural Rhythm Records) www.ruralrhythm.com ^[9]
The latest album from Grasstowne, featuring Alan Bibey, Steve Gulley, Justin Jenkins, Adam Haynes and Kameron Keller, presents a dozen new songs from band members Bibey, Haynes and Gulley, plus Chris Stuart, Janet Beazley, Wes Golding, Ronnie Bowman, Craig Market, Jake Landers and Vassar Clements. A shiny red 1941 Chevrolet Coupe graces the album cover, and titles include "Grass Stain," "Blue Rocking Chair," "I Don't Worry about You Anymore," "Old Time Way," the title cut and more.

Tony Holt & The Wildwood Valley Boys, *Lost Highways & Treasured Memories* (Old Heritage Records, www.oldheritagerecords.com ^[14])
In liner notes Bill Yates says, "Tony Holt has not only turned into a good band leader, but also a fine vocalist, following in the rich tradition of his father, Aubrey, former member of the legendary Boys from Indiana, who is now a current member of the Wildwood Valley Boys. Together, The Wildwood Valley Boys can be viewed as a re-energized, updated version within the Boys from Indiana tradition. Along with seven originals from the elder Holt, the song list includes compositions from Bill Anderson, Jimmy Skinner, Tom Holt and more."

Sierra Hull, *Daybreak* (Rounder Records, www.rounder.com ^[8])
In liner notes Jewly Hight comments, "Sierra's first album held just a few originals, but she wrote seven of these twelve, a collection that stands up quite well next to the outside material. There's a pair of sprightly instrumentals, her first-ever Western swing number and several that show her emotional sophistication: in songs that fall squarely in the bluegrass tradition, feelings are out

in the open; during country-leaning compositions, she ponders relationships from more introspective angles; and the title track—a breathtaking pop ballad—is the most ruminative moment of all.

Jake Leg Stompers, *Hill Country Hoodoo* (Hoo-Doo Records, www.jakelegstompers.com ^[15]) Since 2005 the Jake Leg Stompers have built a following in Nashville and throughout the Southeast with engaging and playful public performances that call for the manners, moods and repertoire of early 20th century medicine shows, featuring period dress and vintage instruments. The line-up features Hambone Willie Nevil, Lucille Dupin, Junior Socrates Cottonberry, Jersey Slim Hawkins and Horatio Algernon Whiplash (aka “Noisy?”). Songs presented include “Beale Street Holiday,” “Big Road Blues,” “Field Mouse Stomp,” “Aunt Caroline Dyer,” “I Shall Not Be Moved” and more.

Sarah Jarosz, *Follow Me Down* (Sugar Hill Records, www.sugarhillrecords.com ^[16]) Jarosz demonstrates a sense of versatility and musical adventure on her second Sugar Hill release. She is as comfortable penning the tragic, old-timey “Annabelle Lee”—an adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe’s final poem, or a modernized Appalachian ode to secret love like “Run Away,” as she is cultivating contemporary singer-songwriter introspection in a song like “Here Nor There.” Her instrumental skills on mandolin, octave mandolin, clawhammer banjo and acoustic guitar are showcased on nine original songs plus “Ring Them Bells” (Dylan) and “The Tourist” (Yorke, Greenwood, Selway, Greenwood, O’Brien).

Alison Krauss & Union Station, *Paper Airplane* (Rounder Records, www.rounder.com ^[8]) The sepia-toned band photo on the front of the long-awaited new Alison Krauss & Union Station album lends a mood of quiet introspection and timelessness that is reflected in Krauss’s tradition-based, yet totally unique band sound. Krauss and Tyminski share lead vocal duties on songs written by Robert Lee Castleman, Peter Rowan, Angel Snow & Viktor Krauss, Aoife O’Donovan, Richard Thompson, Tim O’Brien, Jeremy Lister, Sydney Cox, John Pennell, band members Barry Bales and Jerry Douglas, and more. Cuts #11-17 are bonus tracks in the version of the CD sold at Target department stores.

Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver, *Drive Time* (Mountain Home Music Company, www.crossroadsmusic.com ^[17]) In liner notes for Lawson’s new seven-song EP Kyle Cantrell writes, “The soaring, perfectly delivered, precise harmonies, the impeccable musicianship, and song selection that’s always one step ahead of the rest, make this perhaps the best work Doyle has done to date.” Guitarist/drummer Mike Rogers contributes three originals, alongside Paul Simon’s “Gone at Last,” Dan Seals’ “Love on Arrival,” Lawson’s instrumental “The Greenbrier Hop” and the gospel favorite, “Precious Memories.”

The Lewis Tradition, *Precious Memories* (Thoroughbred Records, division of Daywind Records, www.daywindrecords.com ^[18]) The gospel bluegrass tradition of Bluegrass Hall of Famers, The Lewis Family continues with “The Lewis Tradition,” featuring Janis Lewis Phillips on vocals; her son Lewis Phillips on guitar, banjo and vocals; the late Wallace Lewis’ son Travis Lewis on acoustic bass and Travis’ son, Jameson Lewis on piano. They are joined on this 14-song album by Hargus “Pig” Robbins, Buddy Spicher, Bruce Watkins, Kyle Callaway, Brooke Phillip, Jeff Easter and Greg Cole. The set list includes “The Old Camp Meeting Days,” “Children Talk to Angels,” “I’m Going to Make Heaven My Home,” “Softy and Tenderly” and more.

Lonesome Traveler, *Looking for a Way* (www.lonesometravelerband.com ^[19])

The third release from this Colorado Front Range-based bluegrass band features the talents of Jodi Boyce, Chad Fisher, Ansel Foxley, Evan Neal, Dustin Scott and Rick Scott. Produced by Gene Libbea, the material is all original (from Scott, Foxley and Fisher), except for Gretchen Peters' "If Wishes Were Horses," sung here by mandolinist Jodi Boyce. This is probably the only CD package you'll see this year with a compass embedded in the front cover.

Steve Martin and the Steep Canyon Rangers, *Rare Bird Alert* (Rounder, www.rounder.com

^[8]) Steve Martin is joined by the Steep Canyon Rangers, who toured with Martin extensively during the past year) in his second bluegrass album. Included are 13 new Martin-penned tracks, including a live version of "King Tut" and the crowd favorite a cappella "Atheists Don't Have No Songs." The guys are joined by Paul McCartney and The Dixie Chicks on vocals, on two cuts. The album title was inspired by Martin's upcoming movie with Owen Wilson and Jack Black. *Big Year*, is a comedy about bird-watchers based on the book, *The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession*.

Kelsey Matthews, *The Blood is Applied* (paula.brown60@gmail.com ^[20])

The debut recording from 16-year-old Kelsey Matthews is an all-bluegrass gospel project that spotlights her singing. A number of gospel favorites are included like "I'll Be Clinging to a Saving Hand," "Beulah Land" and "Are You Washed in the Blood," along with Ron Block's "A Living Prayer" and the Statler Brothers/Daily & Vincent song, "More Than a Name on a Wall." Ben Allen provides all the instrumentation on the CD.

Brock McGuire Band; *Green Grass, Blue Grass: Roots Music from Ireland & America*; (www.brockmcguireband.com ^[21])

In liner notes Paul Wells, from the Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University says, "When present-day Irish traditional musicians encounter present-day American old-time and bluegrass musician, it's a meeting of musical cousins." When the musicians involved [in this project] are some of the finest players in their respective worlds, the overall results can be something quite special and extraordinary." Ireland's Brock McGuire Band is joined on the project by Ricky Skaggs, Aubrey Haynie, Bryan Sutton, Jeff Taylor and Mark Fain.

Tom Mindte & Jeremy Stephens, *Radio Favorites & Sacred Songs* (Patuxent Music, www.pxrec.com ^[22])

"Duet singing is the nexus of music, as I see it," comments Tom Mindte. "Everything else is peripheral." In their second album Tom, on mandolin and Jeremy Stephens, on guitar, present a collection of songs learned from Bill & Charlie Monroe, Ted Lundy & Bob Paisley, Paul & Roy, Reno & Smiley, Buzz Busby & Leon Morris and more. Highlights include "Columbus Stockade Blues," "Tragic Love," "What is Home Without Love," "Do you Call That Religion," "It Rained a Mist" and more.

Mountain Heart, *That Just Happened* (www.mountainheart.com ^[23])

In liner notes Craig Havighurst says, "this EP should be remembered as more than just a new chapter in the band's career—more like the beginning of book two in a trilogy. Going forward, a lot is possible with this configuration and its huge range of skills and gifts. They still have that bluegrass-inspired name and bluegrass woven into their DNA. But they also have the ambition to jump fences and the daring to pull that off with style and infectious passion." In addition to the Jim VanCleve-penned title cut, two Josh Shilling originals are included, along with "Little Sadie," "The Ride" and Greg Allman's "Whipping Post."

Tara Nevins, *Wood and Stone* (Sugar Hill, www.sugarhillrecords.com ^[16])

Americana roots traditionalist Tara Nevins presents an exploration of her own heritage, musical and otherwise, in her first solo album since *Mule to Ride* in 1999. Fans of Nevins? work with Donna the Buffalo the past 21 years will enjoy this showcase of her talents as a singer and songwriter, along with her chops on fiddle, guitar and accordion and scrub board. Nevins is joined by Larry Campbell, Teresa Williams, Levon Helm, Jim Lauderdale, Allison Moore and more.

NewFound Road, *Live at the Down Home* (Rounder Records, www.rounder.com ^[8])

The latest from NewFound Road is a high energy live album recorded December 4, 2011 in Johnson City, Tennessee at The Down Home. Band members Tim Shelton, Jamey and Joe Booper, and Josh Miller are joined by Mountain Heart?s Jim VanCleve on fiddle. In liner notes Randy Pitts says, ?These boys can punch it out, in a manner that reminds me of the classic Tony Rice Unit of the ?80s. Unlike many of the classic pioneering bands, with whom the only visible movement on stage besides their flying fingers might be a barely discernable clenching of a jaw muscle, these boys have a good time at their live shows, and it is evident.?

Bobby Osborne, *Memories* (Rural Rhythm Records, www.ruralrhythm.com ^[9])

Several special guests have come together for this album to celebrate Bluegrass Hall of Famer Bobby Osborne?s 60th anniversary in the music business. Patty Loveless, David Grisman, Russell Moore, Glen Duncan, Ronnie McCoury, Sammy Shelor, Audie Blaylock, Takeharu Kunimoto and David Harvey join Osborne and his Rocky Top X-Press band. Highlights include ?Mountain Fever? with Moore, ?Ruby,? ?Memories? (with Loveless), ?With a Pain in my Heart (with Blaylock), Man from Rosine (with Duncan, McCoury, Grisman, Shelor & Harvey), ?Up This Hill & Down? (with Kunimoto) and more.

Patent Pending, *Not a Day Goes By* (Tuscarora Records, www.patentpendingband.com ^[24])

The latest album from Patent Pending is dedicated to their banjo player and friend, Jim Steptoe, who passed away August 30, 2009 after 30 years with the band. The line-up features Eldred Hill, Rusty Williams, Leigh Taylor-Kron, Ed Barney, Keith Dill and Buster Sexton. A dozen cuts include five Hill originals, ?Somewhere Over the Rainbow,? ?Don?t This Road Look Rough and Rocky,? ?Last Letter Home? and more.

James Reams and the Barnstromers, *One Foot in the Honky Tonk* (Mountain Redbird Music, www.jamesreams.com ^[25]) In liner notes journalist Donald Teplyske says, ?There are few bluegrass singers who match the lithe and masculine timbre Reams brings to the songs he is called to perform?. With *One Foot in the Honky Tonk*, James Reams further defines his bluegrass, blending the varied elements of the roadhouse with sounds from the hills of Kentucky and her neighbors.? Along with band originals, the songs were written by Kevin Welch & Mike Henderson, Stonewall Jackson, Fred Eaglesmith, Harlan Howard, Tina Aridas, Arthur Smith, Roberta Gordon & Tim Carter and more.

The Roys, *Lonesome Whistle* (Rural Rhythm, www.ruralrhythm.com ^[9])

Recording Lonesome Whistle was the culmination of a dream that began for brother and sister Lee and Elaine Roy when they were growing up in Massachusetts and New Brunswick, Canada, as they listened to traditional country and bluegrass music. The duo?s vocal harmony and songwriting are showcased on their debut for Rural Rhythm on songs like ?Coal Minin? Man,? ?That?s What Makes it Love? (with Ricky Skaggs & The Whites), ?Give a Ride to the Devil,? the title cut and more.

Mike Scott, *Take Me Lord and Use Me* (Rural Rhythm Christian, www.ruralrhythm.com [9])
Fan's of Mike Scott's work previously with Jim & Jesse, Danny Davis & the Nashville Brass, his own All-American Band, and in more recent years Ronnie Reno & the Reno Tradition, will be pleased to hear Mike's new album which features his vocals as well as his talents on banjo. Scott is joined by Vince Gill, Sonya Isaacs, Carl Jackson, Claire Lynch, Shelton Frazier, Ricky Skaggs, Rhonda Vincent, Buck White, Jesse McReynolds and his wife, Brenda Scott (of the Marshall Family) on vocals for songs like "When the Angels Carry Me Home," "Since I Laid My Burdens Down," and "When All is Said and Done," plus more.

Tommy Shaw, *The Great Divide* (Pazzo Music, www.tommyshaw.com [26])
Tommy Shaw, the lead singer of the rock band Styxx, explores his love for the mandolin and bluegrass music on his new album. Shaw wrote or co-wrote all 11 songs, including "The Next Right Thing," "Back in Your Kitchen" (about his wife's cooking), "Sawmill," "Afraid to Love," "Give 'em Hell Harry" and more. Tommy is joined by Brad Davis, Sam Bush, Byron House, Rob Ickes, Scott Vestal and Stuart Duncan, among others, on the CD.

Charlie Sizemore, *Heartbreak Longing for a Home* (Rounder Records, www.rounder.com [8])
) In liner notes Larry Nager says, "There's a common thread of restlessness, of yearning, in the material chosen so carefully. The people in these songs are all seeking comfort, some momentary peace, in a lover's arms in "Down in the Quarter," in a glass of "Red Wicked Wine" or in fantasies of unobtainable women in the movies ("Ashley Judd") or in the apartment upstairs ("Walking the Floor Over Me.")" Songs are included from Sonny Tacket, John Preston, Paul Craft, Alan Jackson, Tom T. Hall and band mates John Pennell and Matt DeSpain, plus more. Ralph Stanley sings a memorable tenor line on "Wicked Red Wine."

Josh Slone, *Coal Slone & Coal Town* (Rural Rhythm, www.ruralrhythm.com [9])
In liner notes Larry Cordle says, "The first test any singer must pass for me is believability! And WOW, listening to this album, does Josh have some stories to tell?". His baritone style of singing really draws you in and makes you listen to every line, fully capturing your attention from start to finish. Josh may be young but he's definitely not a rookie." Nine of the thirteen songs on Slone's debut are originals. Additional songs were written by Brandon Rickman, Charley Stefl, Jenee Fleenor, Mark Brinkman, Mike Evans and Cordle. Josh and his band are joined on the album by Ron Stewart, Matt DeSpain, Kim Gardner and Gerald Evans.

Kenny Smith, *Return*(Gat3 Records, www.gat3.com) [27] Two-time IBMA Guitar Player of the Year debuts on the Gat3 Records label with an instrumental collection of guitar music. The rhythm section from *Studebaker*, released 13 years ago, returns with Barry Bales and Adam Steffey, plus Aubrey Haynie, Jim Denman and Adam Hurt this time around. Smith plays Norman Blake's 1933 D-28 on the album, along with a 1935 Gibson advanced jumbo.

Valerie Smith, *Blame it on the Bluegrass* (Bell Buckle Records, www.bellbucklerecords.com) [28] The new six-song EP from Valerie Smith was recorded live at the International Bluegrass Music Museum while Smith's band was in town doing a number of presentations for elementary schools in Owensboro, Kentucky. In addition to the Becky Buller/Elizabeth Shrum title cut, the songs include "Where the Sun Never Shines (Flowers); Slow Healing Heart (Rushing); "Four Leaf Clover" (unknown); "A Good Day, Lord" (Buller); and "No Vacancy" (Travis).

Larry Sparks, *Almost Home* (Rounder Records, www.rounder.com [8])

In liner notes two-time IBMA Male Vocalist of the Year explains, "My music's always been lonesome. It's a good lonesome. It's a *real* lonesome sound. It's true." Named for an old bluegrass joke that says all songs are either about leaving home or wanting to go back, *Almost Home* features 12 songs about family, music and faith such as the Hank Locklin hit, "Send Me the Pillow You Dream On" and the inspirational gospel song, "Somebody Touched Me." Also included: "Blue Mountain Melody," "Lines on the Highway," "Momma's Apron Strings" and more.

Nathan Stanley, *My Kind of Country* (Nathan Stanley Entertainment, www.nathanstanleyentertainment.com ^[29]) On this 21-cut collection of traditional country gems, the 18-year-old grandson of Bluegrass Hall of Famer Dr. Ralph Stanley teams up with a Who's Who list of singers including his grandfather, Gene Watson, Del McCoury, Vince Gill, Ricky Skaggs, Rhonda Vincent, Little Jimmy Dickens, Jim Lauderdale, Larry Sparks, Connie Smith, The Isaacs, Marty Stuart, Patty Loveless and John Anderson. Titles include "Love's Gonna Live Here Again," "All I Ever Loved Was You," "Folsom Prison Blues," "Think of What You've Done," "The Darkest Hour is Just Before Dawn" and more.

Ralph Stanley, *A Mother's Prayer* (Rebel Records, www.rebelrecords.com ^[30]) "The autumnal recordings of Ralph Stanley are among the last links to the fierce confrontationalism of true Appalachian music," observes music scholar Colin Escott in his liner notes for the album. "The music, like the people, stood square-jawed in the face of adversity. You can hear the pain in every ghostly trailing note and struggle in every barbed syllable." The song list includes "What Kind of Man," which Stanley co-wrote with Larry Sparks, plus compositions from Sara Evans, Billy & Terry Smith, Clinch Mountain Boys fiddler Dewey Brown and Stanley's grandson, Nathan Stanley. Shawn Lane and Ronnie Bowman wrote the album's title song.

VW Boys, *Retroactive* (Mountain Roads Recordings, www.mountainroadsrecordings.com ^[31]) The VW Boys' debut on the Mountain Roads Recordings label features material from the '50s, '60s and '70 such as "Amie," "All I Have to Do is Dream," "Fire on the Mountain," "Wagon Wheel," "Brown Mountain Light" and more. In liner notes Tom T. Hall writes, "After listening to this album my wife, Miss Dixie, asked me had I ever realized how great the VW Boys can sing. Truthfully they are an entertaining experience and I have never, in all my life, been more entertained as when I rode with them in their van on narrow winding roads between Bristol and Dr. Ralph Stanley's festival. It was a trip and I've never been quite right since. Sing? Yeah, but that's just the gravy."

Josh Williams, *Down Home* (Rounder Records, www.rounder.com ^[8]) The long-awaited album from three-time IBMA Guitar Player of the Year, Josh Williams is his debut on the Rounder label. Fans will recognize favorites like "Lonesome Feeling," "Dream of Me," "Cherokee Shuffle," "Streets of Bakersfield," "Down Home," "Polka on the Banjo" and more. Josh, on lead vocals, guitar and mandolin, is joined by Mickey Harris, Kenny Ingram, Randy Kohrs, Jason Carter, Rhonda Vincent, Aaron McDaris, Tim Dishman, Stuart Duncan, Greg Cahill, Dailey & Vincent, Tony Rice, Carl Jackson, Tina Adair and more.

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