



OF NOTE: This month's CD reviews.

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- » Member Login
- » Become A Member

» Home

- » Parlor Showcase
- » Full Circle
- » Front Porch 1
- » Front Porch 2

» CD Reviews

- » Recordially, Lou Curtiss
- » The Bluegrass Corner
- » The Zen of Recording
- » Hosing Down
- » Radio Daze

» Calendar

» Links

- » Find An Issue
- » Back Issues

» Contact US

- » **Complete Our Survey!**



The Cat Mary
Postbellum Neighborhood
by *Sven-Erik Seaholm*

This latest release from the Cat Mary begins with the sound of a toy or music box being wound up and let go. It is in many ways an appropriate metaphor, with regard to the unleashing of virtuosity that ensues. Singer/songwriter/guitarist Andrew Markham and company take us on a rollicking, careening excursion through a multitude of lyrical images and musical influences, ultimately arriving at a singularly original, if faintly familiar, destination.

Markham (on record at least) seems not unlike the character Jim Williams from John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* — earthy, educated, cultured, funny, and smarter than you. This is perhaps best evidenced by the ingredients of his latest offering, in which we find various elements of mountain music (fiddle, slide dobro, upright bass) wrapped in light gossamer jazz shadings, courtesy of the Stephen 'Hoops' Snyder's alternately nimble and dynamic piano and organ playing, as well as percussionist Kevin Dow's intricately creative, at times Keltner-esque approach. Bassist Ken Dow displays an especially light touch for such a big sounding instrument, like a dainty sumo wrestler or a ballet dancing elephant. Violinist Melissa Hartley once again exhibits huge strides in her playing, taking on an even larger, more central role in the band's arrangements, sometimes resulting in too much of a good thing. How can we miss the fiddle if it won't go away?

This is largely a nitpicking observation from a listener spoiled by the rich and fertile loam of Markham's songwriting. Titles like 'A River, A Dead Mule, A TrainÉ,' 'Old Slewfoot,' 'The Fleshpots of the Orient,' and 'Anniversary' invoke an anticipation of excellence that is ultimately delivered in spades far more often than not.

What is most evident beyond the wonderful musicality of the playing and the arrangements is just how wonderful a singer Markham really is, especially on the sweet and deliberate 'The Big, Dumb Way,' where his voice and the song's melody become one lonely, longing sound, like the distant whistle of a midnight train bound for nowhere in particular.

Engineer Peter Sprague shows that he's more than just a guitar genius by capturing the beautiful essence of every instrument and its accompanying ambience with a open, crisp, and focused sound that allows the listener to hear every meticulously rendered layer, while retaining a unified band sound throughout. Kudos to him for making a purely amazing sounding record.

With a Tony-award winning rhythm section, a heartfelt collection of songs, and an all-around A-team of supporting players, perhaps winding it all up and letting it run wild was the exact right thing for Markham and the Cat Mary to do.



Paper Moon
Miniatures
by *Craig Yerkes*

Miniatures, the new CD from guitar duo Paper Moon, is a sly and utterly entertaining piece of work. The approach is delightfully eclectic with nods to such diverse influences as Al DiMeola and the Helecasters with some Django, Metheny, Paco DeLucia, and Wes Montgomery thrown in along the way. Paper Moon has managed to merge these different styles into a truly original sound and approach all their own.

Track one, 'Rayuela,' (a straight ahead, up-tempo, acoustic/Spanish-style crowd pleaser) is actually the weakest offering on the disc due to how little it does to forecast how fresh the rest of the recording will be. Paper Moon's two players, Scot Taber and Daniel Dever, move seamlessly between acoustic and electric on the following tracks, bringing all kinds of funky surprises along the way. There is an almost giddy approach dripping off this music, as if they just couldn't wait to add that next guitar part to see what it would sound like. Much to duo's credit, though, it never becomes a guitar orgy thanks to an over-riding sense of doing what's right for the song. Track three, the 7/8 offering called 'The Freneticist,' reminded me of DiMeola's early stuff with a great mix of muted electric licks driving the rhythm and Spanish/nylon-string lead lines adding a Latin fire. 'While She Sleeps' features a wonderful waltz melody and should bring a smile to fans of the super-smooth, octave-style/Montgomery-esque electric jazz sound. This disc really launches into the stratosphere starting with track five, 'Swing Sets.' Its intro features an effect that makes it sound like it's being played through some kind of cheap record player in a caf  somewhere in Europe. To me, this clever intro signals that the rest of the disc is designed to take the listener on a trip through the limitless musical world of these artists. From the super tasty gypsy solos on 'Swing Set' and the funky backwards guitar intro on 'Caf  Antiguo' to the delightful handling of the melody on 'Vals   Tema De Strauss' and the beautifully breezy leads on 'Emily,' this is music that keeps bringing smiles. My favorite is track ten, 'Epilogue,' which features a stunningly beautiful, almost otherworldly melody and an equally amazing counterpart of fretless bass, strings, and perfectly complementary sound effects.

This CD should appeal to a broad spectrum of music lovers, especially those with an ear toward world music. There is musical invention here to be sure, but everything is done within the context of making music that is just plain fun to listen to. If some of this material doesn't make it into some kind of soundtrack, it will only be because the right people didn't hear it. The Paper Moon guys have pulled off quite a trick with Miniatures, creating an artistically uncompromised musical kaleidoscope that is a blast for the rest of us to listen to. Bravo!



The Bobs
Rhapsody in Bob
by Raul Sandelin

The sublime is not only about genius and mastery, it's about proportion and context. For example, a single anchovy emulsified, disguised, and folded into a Caesar salad dressing is, well, sublime. An entire tube of anchovy paste slathered upon the targeted leaves of Romaine is not recommended until at least 20 dates into the relationship.

Rhapsody in Bob

With this in mind, I've been trying to figure out in which context and in what proportions the Bobs peak on the ol' 'sublime index.' I think I've found the quotient: their ironic use of a

cappella to re-interpret almost everything under the musical sun works best at the level of the 60-second commercial.

Do you have a dish soap to which you wish to ascribe human qualities? The Bobs could take a quartet of singing soap bubbles and let those bubbles harmonize until they're clean. How about an anthropomorphized car motor? Who better to give voice to the pistons and carburetor than those lovable San Franciscans who have been vocalizing walls of sound for 25 years?

The Bobs are the greatest jingle and sound-effects band ever. With sheer virtuosity, they can stretch a sound bite into an equally worthy three-minute-long operetta. It's a great concept but how long can this gimmick sustain itself?

Rhapsody in Bob asks this question again (despite a new lineup, every member's middle name is coincidentally 'Bob') - are we disproportionately mixing our guffaws with serious art? Are we slathering on the comedio-a cappella schtick a little too rich, leaving us unsure as to how to categorize their music, even when the 'uncategorizable' is certainly a legitimate category in its own right?

The Bobs hit the ground running as they tackle a difficult set of tunes. From Tin Pan Alley we get 'Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens' and Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue.' From the Woodstock/MTV generations, we are dosed with Cream's 'White Room' and Tom Petty's 'Free Falling.' Such nuggets as Spike Jones' 'Teenage Brain Surgeon' and Bertold Brecht's 'Alabama Song' get the usual Bob treatment while de-constructing 20th century pop music history. Every song here is indelibly transformed into the Bobs' own post-vocal dreamscape.

With unrestrained irony, the album's title suggests more clown juggling although their rendition of 'Rhapsody in Blue' is quite beautiful, almost solemn at times. The Bobs, along with pianist Bob Malone do an outstanding job of stretching George and Ira's whisperings out to a stunning 17 minutes!

With more Bobs than an apple bobbing contest and a sense of humor that keeps it all fun, this group not only keeps it quirky, it rounds it off with a spectacular rendering of one of America's finest pieces.

The Bobs will be at Dizzy's on October 12 at 8pm.



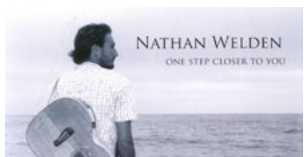
Kim DiVincenzo
Hummingbird
by Craig Yerkes

Upon hearing 'Home,' the first track on Kim DiVincenzo's (now Divine) new CD, Hummingbird, my first reaction was that this is the most radio ready tune I have heard come out of San Diego since, well, maybe ever. DiVincenzo and her producer Keith Orfanides have managed to produce an album that sounds as if it was done on a major label budget. To be more accurate, they have managed to create a six-song disc on which most tracks rise to that level.

'Home' is pure, ethereal pop magic with soaring vocals (layered to biblical proportions), evocative lyrics, and an astounding instrumental backdrop, which incorporates a bewildering mix of vintage sounds (love the guitar and organ tones) and masterfully applied effects. This is home run stuff here. 'Trouble,' another tune that sounds ready for radio play, also falls squarely into the category of 'pop music for the discriminating listener.' Its vocals and instrumental tracks crackle with just the right amount of angst to complement the romantic tension and aggression in the lyrics, plus the chorus delivers an enormous, can't miss hook. The other tracks veer off the pop highway, but are all solid offerings that fall more into the indie/ singer-songwriter world. Jane Lui lends her formidable piano skills to the pleasingly melancholy 'Far Away,' and 'Broken' is an intriguingly dark and aggressive track that reminded me a bit of Kate Bush. 'A Noble Prince' provides some nice depth to the disc with its poetic lyrics, complex melodic structure (nicely complimented with Tori Amos-esque background vocals), and lead vocals that show Divine's impressive range. 'What's It Gonna Be,' a longing, yet cleverly playful love song, wisely strips the format down to just vocal and guitar, somehow avoiding sounding flat compared to the more 'produced' tracks.

While the engine that drives this music is the artist's songwriting and performing skills, I can't say enough about the amazing production of this recording. Listening through headphones, it becomes even more impressive as you hear all the added subtle touches, all at the right times and in the right doses. For instance, on 'Broken' and 'Trouble,' the instruments and vocals build with such subtle intensity that you don't realize how high everything has notched up until the tracks suddenly switch to a single voice and guitar. Brilliant! I loved how well recorded and well played the violin tracks are and if you can find a guitar track on this disc that isn't world class, you have a better ear than I do.

The DiVincenzo/Orfanides pairing has proved to be a musical match made in heaven and my guess is that this recording will successfully garner attention far beyond the local level.



Nathan Welden
One Step Closer to You
by Dave Sawyer

One Step Closer to You is San Diego native Nathan Welden's first full-length CD. Produced by local legend, John Katchur, it features top local talents Jeff Berkley, Ron Franklin, Christiane Lucas, and Katchur himself on bass



and lead guitar.

This is a beautiful collection of easy-on-the-ears acoustic-pop/folk music with Welden's smooth, honey-sweet vocals and laid-back, Southern California sun, surf, and sand style.

John Katchur's deft work on guitar and bass - and recording - along with Christiane Lucas' unique style of harmony vocals, provides beautiful support without overshadowing Welden's finest instrument, his voice.

As fine a songwriter as Welden is, he chose to use only three of his own compositions in this collection for some reason. I've always believed that, when recording your own album (especially a first full-length album), you should avoid covering other songwriters.

To his credit, Welden chose very good songwriters to cover, including David Wilcox, John Denver, and one fine and under-appreciated local gentleman by the name of Ron Franklin, who also plays guitar on those covers, bringing an interesting and effective twist to them.

Overall, this is a very satisfying and even touching collection of music. Listeners will fall in love with Welden's voice, which has an honest, sincere, maybe even naive quality that one can't help but accept as true, without question.

The final cut, 'Living on Love,' seems a little weak in the harmony area for me. I can't tell if it's the recording of the vocal or simply Lucas' style. I might be a bit nit-picky, but that's my job! Regardless, the song still meets the high standard set by the rest of the album.

From performance, recording, and mastering to cover and case design and packaging, this is a quality professional effort. It is well thought out and implemented, with beautiful photos and just the right amount of liner notes and thank yous.

I don't know whether Welden is set-up to sell CDs from his website or any of the popular online methods as of this writing. However, you can visit his MySpace and find out where he's playing next. I'm sure he'll have a few discs on hand.

Part of my goal here is to get you, the reader, interested in going to hear the music, see the artist at a show, and decide whether you like the music or not. I also want to offer constructive feedback to the artist and others who might be in the process of putting a CD together.

I'll be posting this review, along with my other reviews, on my MySpace blog. This will allow you to respond and tell me if you agree or disagree with me. All I ask is that you keep it real and avoid 'colorful' remarks. Thanks for reading and happy listening!

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