

RECORD REVIEWS

Jo Carol Pierce *Dog of Love* Self-released

FROM THE TEN-SECOND Spoken intro ("I want to crawl up in your bed and stretch my hairy body against the slow, sweet curves of your sleep") straight into the title song ("Let me be your dog of love, fetch you anything you want, please let me, let me," **Jo Carol Pierce's** *Dog of Love* bumps up against complexities of the human condition. That title song ends with a desire to be inflated and dated.

Pierce's *Bad Girls Upset By The Truth*, released in 1995, is classic monologue-with-music storytelling. *Dog of Love* isn't classic because it's a little uneven but it is, within its own universe, a good piece of what's described as "theatrical alternative pop." The CD is mostly sung but has the feel of a spoken-word CD. Her voice works well with the material, which is sometimes bitter, sometimes defiant, often economical; Pierce is more



She wrote or co-wrote all the songs on *Dog of Love*: Joe Carol Pierce

poet and performer than singer:

"he's a wild card in your cup of gin,"

"standing in the mystery of who you are and are to me," and,

"faraway lightnin' like threads of fire sews the day together again, everything alive stages a big revival."

On one of the few spoken-word pieces, after a session with her therapist, she dreams a new grammar rule: "Any personal pronoun could be replaced with the phrase 'a pair of your panties.' The example given was a pair of your panties just robbed that liquor store," followed by the sound of a car speeding away.

On the closing "Barb Wire Crown," the blessed Virgin Mary "got real mad and then she got drunk and rock hard sad, crashed through heaven grace of gravity dropped like a rock in our deep blue sea."

The 16 musicians include familiar Austin names **Bukka Allen**, **Mark Andes**, **David Halley**, **David Murray** and **Freddy Krc**.

Pierce wrote or co-wrote all the

pieces, several with Halley. *Dog of Love* can snarl and bite, perhaps more from fear than aggression.

—TOM GEDDIE

BettySoo *Little Tiny Secrets* Sweet Papaya Music

BettySoo's SECOND (AND "SECOND hand a half") recording is filled with lyrically engaging confessional pop-folk songs. The young Austin-based singer-songwriter's voice is appealing without showing a lot of variety; the songs are sincere and, with a couple of exceptions, serious. She claims to be drawn toward things that are broken; on two of the ten songs on the new *Little Tiny Secrets*, she expresses her compassion with humor just to lighten the weight of gravity.

The songs deal with living a dream on the road, trying to become the person we pretend to be, a cautionary tale about men who make idle promises, love and revenge, and more.

The closer, "Goodbye," shares the aftermath at the end of a relationship where you tell yourself "say goodbye / to the horse and its prince / to big castles / and the corpse of a witch," and say hello to accepting your own reality.

The "second and a half" recording is a four-song EP, *Never the Pretty Girl*, with similar songs; proceeds from this one are donated to the nonprofit human rights agency International Justice Mission that rescues victims of violence, sexual exploitation, slavery, and expression.

BettySoo Kim is a second-generation Korean-American who likes the "Southern-ness" of her stage, and given name. She points that her father's middle name is Soo, too, making him a boy named Sue, uh, Soo.

She sings and plays acoustic guitar. Producer **Stephen Doster** (lead guitar), **Todd Wilson** (keyboards), **Mail Man Dave** (drums and upright bass), **Paul Prestridge** (electric bass), **Kristine Shafer** (cello), **Drew Shafer** (violin), and **Stanley Smith** (clarinet and harmonics) join her in the sometimes fairly lush sound.

—TOM GEDDIE

The Belleville Outfit *Wanderin'* Self-released

THE AUSTIN-BASED **Belleville Outfit's** mix of swing, swing-blues, gypsy-jazz, and folk influences add up to an intriguing musical mix on *Wanderin's* dozen songs. The kinda bright, mostly optimistic sound moves the body while the lyrics, sometimes filled with loss, provide a balance.

The title song sounds just a bit more Appalachian-influenced although it fits well within the overall mix. Other highlights include the

slower, fiddle-laced "Ease My Mind," which expresses the sentiment to "be mind 'til I'm dead and gone, I don't want to walk here alone," and a cover of the upbeat standard "It's A Good Day."

Rob Teter and **Phoebe Hunt** share vocals. Teter adds guitar, Hunt fiddle. **Jonathan Konya** (drums), **Connor Forsyth** (piano), **Jeff Brown** (upright bass) and **Marshall Hood** round out the band.

The Austin-based **Belleville Outfit** (several of the members formerly where in **The DesChamps Band**) is at its best on the faster songs, sometimes becoming a little inconsistent when it slows down. Still, the gems sparkle.

—TOM GEDDIE

Whiskeyfish *Sushi* Self-released

THE FOUR GUYS IN THE COUNTRY-rock band **Whiskeyfish** couldn't be faulted for believing they worked on their first CD most of their lives. And, while any artistic endeavor is, in a sense, a to-this-point-in-your-life project, the truth is that the band has existed for only three or so years. The CD, *Sushi*, is finally done after a number of patient adjustments to get the mix the way the band wants it.

J.P. Fisher, the band's elder statesman at 30, sings and plays acoustic rhythm guitar. His brother, **Matt**, plays lead guitar and sings. **Jacob Phillips** plays bass, and **Jonathon Wilson** plays drums. The latter three are in their early to mid 20s; all four live in Van Zandt County in Northeast Texas.

"It's been a long process making this CD," J.P. said. "Part of that is doing it right, which costs money. We're a small-time band spending big-time money."

The long-awaited CD fits squarely into the Texas alt-country-rock scene with influences including **Willie Waylon** and **Merle**. And **Robert Earl Keen**, **Billy Joe Shaver**, **Ryan Adams**, **Pat Green** and **Randy Rogers**. And, less obvious, **Adam Carroll**, **Hayes Carll**, **Slaid Cleaves** and **Chris Knight**, which is probably where some of the darker songs come from. And **Stevie Ray Vaughan** and **Pearl Jam**, which is where much of the rock influence comes from.

Sushi's songs are about love and leavin' and neon lights and temptation. The CD rocks out a little less than the jam-band-style live shows I've seen, which is okay; live audiences are more compelling than studio walls, and there's a certain amount of on-stage attitude that fits the subgenre and their ages.

"Our music comes straight from our gut," J.P. said. "It's not all good-times music. Some of our stuff is pretty deep; there's nothing wrong with that. A few people ask why we write such dark material. We write some happy tunes, too; half the world is having a good time, and half the world is crying."

—TOM GEDDIE

Jeff Griffith *If It Ain't One Thing It's Another* Arrowhead Records

WITH A FINE, FAIRLY DEEP AND smooth voice made for the semi-traditional honky-tonk songs he sings, **Jeff Griffith** shares six **Joe Stampley/Tony Stampley** songs and five other real-country covers on *If It Ain't One Thing It's Another*. **Joe Stampley** produced, which might account for both the number of his songs on the CD and for the solid session players who put the project together in a Nashville studio.

The Santa Fe, Texas, native began playing as a child and performs at honky-tonks in and around San Antonio and Houston, getting his inspiration from **George Jones**, **Vern Gosdin**, **Hank Williams Jr.** and **Ricky Skaggs** while marrying his high school sweetheart and building his own construction business.

The drinkin' and lovin' and cheatin' and fishin' mix is filled with two-steps, shuffles, and ballads filled (but not to the brim) with acoustic, electric, and steel guitars; bass; drums; keyboard; and fiddle.

Stampley said Griffith has "one of the most beautiful country voices I have ever heard." "Authentic" or "believable" might be better words than "beauty," but the idea's the same. Griffith could headline in country dancehalls, where people want to dance to familiar songs, just about anywhere. *If It Ain't One Thing It's Another* is a strong cover album.

—TOM GEDDIE

Darryl Lee Rush *Live From The River Road Icehouse* Shiner/Palo Duro Records

A RAGGED QUALITY IN **Darryl Lee Rush's** voice lends sincerity to the performances in *Live From The River Road Icehouse*, which includes nine songs recorded during a show in New Braunfels and two studio tracks.

The Texas country-folk-rock CD deals with small-town memories and misadventures, and Rush's crowd-pleasing "White Trash Paradise" about a man whose American dream is less than ambitious. Surely meant to be funny, he sings it straight without a bit of sonic irony.

In his two studio cuts, "Lot" and the excellent, anthem-like "Shotgun Annie," Rush first tells the story of a woman struggling with her lot in life, then observes in the slow, seething

rock closer that the blood on the people's hands comes from building a nation that may not be living up to its Populist ideals.

He also covers **Steve Earle's** "Johnny Come Lately," **Sam Baker's** "Truale," and **Matthew Ryan's** "Irrelevant."

Rush adds acoustic guitar, backed by **Scott Oldner** (electric guitar and background vocals), **Michael McShane** (bass guitar, background vocals), **Don Gallia** (harmonica), and **Andy Mayer** (drums), joined by guest **Tommy Detamore** (lap steel).

The CD's mix obscures the performances just a little, which is not unusual for this kind of project. Nevertheless, *Live From The River Road Icehouse* is a good follow-up to his debut, 2005's *Llano Avenue*. He won recording time for that one in a highly competitive ShinerBock contest with KHYI 95.3 FM The Range in the Dallas area.

—TOM GEDDIE

Dean Strickland *Hitchhiking Guitarman* Never Die Records

Dean Strickland's HITCHHIKING Guitarman is a country-gospel album with sincerity as its greatest asset. Strickland obviously has something he must communicate on this slow-paced, solo acoustic guitar-and-vocals CD.

He asks why classic country music had to die, and sings that he loves Texas.

He sings of making his wife and kids proud, and reminds us that

Jesus loves us all. He thanks his family for raising "a boy like me" who, now that he's a man, shows his gratitude by writing a song that says he loves them.

He sings that in 1967 an angel came down to Earth from heaven and told his mom that he would have a song and name him Dean, and at age six he picked up a guitar and began to use his gift "for writing beautiful poems and great songs" and that his ramblin' isn't gamblin' because the Lord watches over him.

He sings that, like everyone, he started out small, but he had big dreams and followed his well-thought-out scheme and now he's bigger.

From Strickland's bio at The Musicians Institute music business program in Hollywood, which he attended after a stint at the University of North Texas: "His music is as unrefined as his appearance. With simple yet raunchy lyrics matching his screaming voice, he bitches about hating you one minute and loving you the next. The music is sure to speak for itself."

The songs on *Hitchhiking Guitarman* are not the least bit raunchy; neither does he scream. Perhaps that's part of following the well-thought-out dream.

—TOM GEDDIE

BILL'S RECORDS

Live Entertainment every Saturday

February 2 ... Michael Hatley, Tom Faulkner, Chute Nine
February 9 ... Band of Heathens, Classix, Jed Marum
February 16 ... Dean Seltzer • February 23 ... Jayson Bales
March 1 ... Billy Harvey • May 3 ... Mary Cutrufello

CD'S • RECORDS • COLLECTIBLES
Bill's 1313 S. Lamar
Dallas, TX 75215 972-234-1496



I SOLD THIS





AND GOT THIS....

We Buy, Sell, And Trade. You Score

2403 S. Stemmons Freeway
(Next to Borders Bookstore)
Lewisville, TX 75067
972-315-3611



www.musicgoround.com/Lewisville