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guitarist,

he plays almost every instrument himself, too, as well as co-producing, a function of lockdown restrictions but one he's happy with. There will also even be some touring, although at least initially limited to Ireland. "It's going to be low-key," he insists, "but I'll have a guitarist with me and maybe some other musicians from time to time depending on circumstances."

He credits Gram Parsons and, perhaps more surprisingly, Elvis Costello for his interest in Americana and country. "Almost Blue was the album for me, and that led me to Gram, Guy Clark and lighter stuff like The Mavericks and I've pursued it ever since. Basically though, I just like a good song, and I like good instrumentation. And then much later I got into western swing completely by chance. I was in Nashville on holiday about ten years ago and ended up going to a club, paying fifteen dollars to see a band I'd never heard of called The Time Jumpers [a group of Nashville session musicians who play regularly in Nashville for fun]. And I looked them up and it said Vince Gill plays occasionally but I thought, no, not on my night. But he was there and he played. And they played some of the best music I'd ever heard and that was that!"

Crockard is a serious talent and an exponent of the timeless virtues of good songwriting and fine playing. It's a shame that this is only his third album but it seems there's now a lot more to come. "I just love songwriting and I've been working on the next album for a couple of months now," he says. "I used to struggle to write lyrics but now it's the other way around and I can have nine sets of lyrics on the go with no music for them!"

Jeremy Searle

TRAMPLED BY TURTLES

★★★★

Alpenglow

(BANJO DAD) www.trampledbyturtles.com



Alpenglow is a reddish light sometimes seen on mountains while the sun remains below the horizon; an apt symbol for a past disappearing and a future uncertain. On their tenth album, heading towards a third decade, the long-established Minnesota alt-bluegrass band Trampled By Turtles are clearly in reflective mood.

The predominant air of weary melancholy, and sense of life getting evanescent, is well served by Dave Simonett's compositions, and equally so by Jeff Tweedy's production. Wilco's main man intuited the requirements, bringing 'A Lifetime To Find' to the table, where it proved a snug fit.

Carpe diem infuses *Alpenglow's* opening 'It's So Hard To Hold On': 'Time grows fast, grab your lover and hold them', though it seems at odds with the tune's unhurried progression and its affecting fiddle, banjo, and acoustic guitar. In similar spirit is the stark 'Central Hillside Blues', while the accompaniment to Simonett's singing is tentative and almost incidental.

There's livelier tempo in 'Starting Over' and 'On The Highway' but the mood is never much broken. Simonett's impressionistic lyrics always intrigue. He may claim, in the final lament 'The Party's Over', that 'I once was a writer of disparate means'. The whole song – indeed, the whole album – indicates that he still is.

Nick West

RAGGED UNION

★★★★

Round Feet, Chrome Smile

(SHINING CASTLE) www.raggedunionbluegrass.com



Round Feet, Chrome Smile is contemporary bluegrass, country-informed, intelligent, impeccably delivered, and with the kind of jaw-dropping masterclass qualities for which bluegrass musicians seem to possess an uncanny facility. From the title-track opener, the core three-piece Ragged Union (supplemented by accomplished bass from Eric Thorin) demonstrate tremendous vitality and skill.

Wisely they eschew the popular bluegrass fashion for offering examples

of breakneck delivery, and when they do perform a speedier cut, such as 'How Tall Does My Bluegrass Grow', the performance doesn't suffer from showboating; instead they support and complement one another succinctly. What stands out consistently are their stylish restraint, perfect control, and clear grasp of the genre, there in abundance on 'Lazy Ol' Daddy' and in the exceptional guitar, fiddle and mandolin interplay of 'Way Up Here'.

Ragged Union also display a satisfying versatility on the quirky, pop-tinged 'Sweet Annie' and jazz-flavoured 'Somebody Call The Doctor', which provide further indication of how Geoff Union, Elio Schiano, and Rebekah Durham sound like a musical match made in heaven.

Steve Coseman

HAL CANNON

★★★★★

Nothin' Lastin'

(OKEHODKEE) www.halcannon.com



As one third of 3hatrio, folklorist Hal Cannon has longed hymned the unique qualities of the Utah

Desert. *Nothin' Lastin'* finds Cannon expanding his musical palette with a host of guest musicians, although his voice and banjo remain the fulcrum (while 3hatrio members Eli Wrangle and Greg Istock are also in attendance) as he delivers a set of what he calls 'simple cautionary tales'.

These songs are steeped in American folklore, the history of the west in particular. Deeply immersive, they draw the listener in. An aural equivalent of Cormac McCarthy's and Larry McMurtry's tales, Cannon weaves a hypnotic spell throughout whether singing about the Civil War or the Mormons' march to Utah and, dotted throughout the album, more personal affairs.

There's a great deal of variety on show, ranging from the 3hatrio-like 'Years Go Down' to the Tom Waits-like monologue on 'Tarantula March' and the saloon bar tinklings of the title song. No matter the style of the song there's a patina, a faded sense of times past, ingrained within. It's most evident on the excellent pairing of 'Marching Off To War', which is replete with martial pride and with its inevitable outcome, and the plaintive wail of 'Johnny Come In From The Cold'. *Nothin' Lastin'* is a magnificent album.

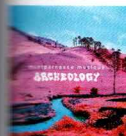
Paul Hemm

MONTPARNASSE MUSIQUE

★★★★★

Archeology

(REAL WORLD) www.montparnassemusique.com



Bringing together sounds old and new from across the mighty continent of Africa proves to be a fruitful task for the DJ and

producer duo who constitute Montparnasse Musique. South African house maestro Aero Manyelo has been earning a deserved reputation for infectious grooves with a South African jazz sensibility for years, and here he teams up with the similarly talented Algerian French producer, Nadjib Ben Bella, who takes a consciously pan-Africanist approach to his music making.

What they make together is genre-defying, mind-expanding music that mixes up the rule book and smashes together urban and rural, traditional and contemporary, northern and southern, acoustic and electronic. Their preference for reimagining is complemented by their choice of collaborators; renowned Congolese music-makers Kasai Allstars, for instance, already have a reputation for traditional music that defies conventional expectations.

On stand-out track 'Panter', township guitars meld seamlessly with electronic rhythms to provide a perfect backing for the vocals of Kasai Allstars' Muambuyi on a track that has 'floor filler' written all over it. In bringing together sounds from across the continent and the ages, this innovative duo helps to write a new chapter in the ever-expanding history of African fusion.

Simon Cross

Reissues and compilations

THE WILLIAMS BROTHERS

★★★★

Memories To Burn

(REGIONAL) www.regionalrecords.com



It's unlikely that Andy 'Can't Get Used To Losing You' Williams ever sang his nephews' – Andrew and David Williams – tune, 'She Took A Lot Of Pills (And Died)'. Originally recorded in 1995 but not released until now, *Memories To Burn* features the Williams twins, who hail from Henderson, Nevada.

Sounding more like The Everly Brothers than Don and Phil themselves, Andrew and David managed to hire the late Don Heffington, who played for Bob Dylan, Lowell George and The Jayhawks

(Lucinda Williams and Mark Olsen et al) on wondrous steel guitar. The album does have an authentic taste of yesteryear, being an old recording with all the vocals recorded live, but it does possess a lot of charm too. Their rendition of Dave Davies's 'Death Of A Clown' is lovely and features some gorgeous steel from Mr. Leisz.

Lovers of The Milk Carton Kids, The Secret Sisters and Nick Lowe should dig the Brothers' oeuvre. Their earworm 'You Can't Hurt Me' might easily be one of Nick Lowe's *Brentford Trilogy* greats. As might the aforementioned 'She Took A Lot Of Pills (And Died)'. It has a similar feel and story to 'Wane Provost' from *Jesus Of Cool*; but, although an elderly former actress dies, in this instance, no one becomes 'the daddy's daughter'.

