

Hit List

Ricky Skaggs' bluegrass technique, where fast songs are blisteringly fast.

The opener here, "Head Hung Down," rips along so briskly it seems there's barely time for all the notes, yet the vocals have a relaxed quality. This ability to perform at supersonic speeds without sounding rushed only comes after years of playing bluegrass. Their harmonies also have an effortless quality. The dual lead vocals on songs such as "You Oughta Be Here" match so perfectly that every

inflection and bent note occurs with perfect synchronization.

Like many great bluegrass bands Dailey and Vincent's arrangements include prodigious amounts of hot picking in between the vocal pyrotechnics. Adam Haynes' fiddle fills and Jeff Parker's mandolin breaks have as much flash as their lead singers' vocals. For a bit of extra firepower, guitar superstar Bryan Sutton adds solos to several songs. But most of the instrumental part on

Brothers from Different Mothers come from Dailey and Vincent's regular touring band.

Given the awards their first release fetched at the 2008 International Bluegrass Music Association convention, at this year's event, *Brothers from Different Mothers* may garner a double-digit number of nominations. This album proves that Dailey and Vincent are far more than one-CD wonders; it cements their position at the apex of the bluegrass cosmos. — SS



The Soundtrack of Our Lives

Communio

Yep Roc Records

Swedish veterans who cover a lot of ground, the members of Soundtrack of Our Lives split from various bands in the '80s and '90s. On this disc, they mix

EXTRA! EXTRA!



Buddy & Julie Miller, *Written in Chalk* (New West Records)

Great songs, great vocals, and great playing always make for a great package. And Buddy's playing is so sublime it almost seems silly to praise it. Throw in guests like Patty Griffin, Emmylou Harris, and Robert Plant, and you've got pretty much a perfect record. — JH



Shemekia Copeland, *Never Going Back* (Telarc)

When blues great Johnny Copeland's daughter released her 1998 debut, at 19, her full-throated delivered drew comparisons to Koko Taylor and Etta James. She had power, but lacked dynamics. Today, she's matured into a true artist, willing to take chances — including having Marc Ribot on guitar (along with producer Oliver Wood), including politically charged songs, and even covering Joni Mitchell. — DF



Words & Music Nashville, *Anthology* (Adroit Records) A

compilation features tunes from 10 of Nashville's best songwriters, producer James Tract's goal was "to generate awareness and expose the vast quantity of extraordinary music that may not be otherwise heard..." Stars such as Trisha Yearwood cover some songs, such as Vince Melamed's "Walk Away Joe," but most are brand new. Every tune is a gem. — SS



Sharon Isbin, *Journey to the New World* (Sony) Complete with

lively sailor's songs, jigs, reels, other echoes of a distant era, as well as interesting twists including the "Joan Baez Suite" by the late John Duarte, if you like fresh classical guitar, this set is not to be missed. Also included is the "Strings & Threads Suite" by composer/violinist Mark O'Connor, who lends unmatched fiddling to Isbin's guitar work. — PP



The Vignatis, *Birth of the Gypsy-billy* (Self-released) Django

Reinhardt meets Scotty Moore in Fabrice and Tracy Vignati's signature Gypsybilly. With the instrumentation of Gypsy jazz — highlighted by hot and stylish Django-esque runs — this is a cross-cultural melting pot *au feu*. Fun and funky! — MD



Terry Hanck, *Always* (Vizztone) One of Northern California's

best-kept secrets, Hanck is an R&B triple threat — as singer, songwriter, and big-toned saxophonist. Aided on guitar by Cat Soubrand, co-producer Kid Andersen, and former boss Elvin Bishop, his set is best summed up by the should-be-hit "Good Good Rockin' Goin' On." *Jut try to keep from dancing!* — DF



Joe Bonamassa, *The Ballad of John Henry* (J&R Adventures)

Bonamassa is a monster guitarist whose playing is bluesy, loud, and tasteful. Though covers sometimes overpower original songs here, as in a great version of Tom Waits' "Jockey Full of Bourbon." It's easy to enjoy his playing while hoping

he one day puts it all together in one terrific package. — JH



Alexis Harte, *Big Red Sun* (Alexis Harte Music)

Harte expands his unique and eclectic work with songs that never go quite where you expect. Production is equally quirky, with lush double-tracked lead vocals on some cuts, while others are stripped to the basics. Each song is a surprise, and with every listen gains resonance and depth. — SS



The Del Morocos, *Blue Black Hair* (HiStyle)

Guitarist Jimmy Sutton's concept is an extremely cool one: three sexy female singers backed by a roots-rockin' quintet. But while Brook Benton's "I Don't Know" goes straight to the heart and "He Knocks Me Out" sounds like something off a Cameo-Parkway comp, Etta James' "I'd Rather Go Blind" proves too tall an order. Promising stuff, though. — DF



Sister Rosetta Tharpe, *Complete Vol. 5 1953-1957* (Frémeaux)

She may be half-forgotten here in her homeland, but Sister Rosetta Tharpe's wild guitar antics and soulful singing boasts legions of fans in France. Thus, here's the two-CD fifth volume in an encyclopedic collection of her recordings that gets better and better all the time. — MD



Johnny Cash, *Original Sun Singles, '55-'58* (Sundazed) The

least egotistical guitarist in rock

history has to be the late Luther Perkins. His muted-bass-string Tele rhythm on Cash's classics was simple, but oh so right. And his to-the-point solo breaks (on "Cry, Cry, Cry," "Get Rhythm," "Luther Played The Boogie Woogie," and others) were equally identifiable, however quirky. Hear both sides of all 12 of Cash's Sun singles. — DF



Rodolphe Raffalli, *Le Retour* (La Lichere) Few guitar-

ists anywhere play today with the exquisite style of Raffalli's mixings of Gypsy jazz, American jazz, Corsican folk music, and the oh-so-cool pop of Georges Brassens. *Le Retour*... is his return to his roots, from Django's "Micro" to South American pieces to originals. — MD



Yes, *Symphonic Live*, (Eagle Records) Backed

by the European Festival Orchestra, Jon Anderson sounds inspired, Chris Squire and Alan White are a rhythm section and much more, and the uniquely talented Steve Howe weaves his varied influences in and out of the music seamlessly. A must for fans. — JH



Cam Newton, *Oregon Outback* (Summit) This

acoustic instrumentalist has been making beautiful music for 30 years, and shows no signs of stopping. Inspired by Oregon's high desert, he achieves a luscious tone on 14 soundscapes, his steel-string, classical, and 12-string aided here and there by bass and/or mandolin, or, as on "Inextinguishable," himself. Meditative but challenging. — DF



Debra Cowan, *Fond Desire Farewell* (Falling Mountain Music)

Produced and arranged by Dave Mattacks, of Fairport Convention, instead of the usual willowly Celtic soprano, Cowan's warm alto powers through the lyrics. Whether she sings material from Richard Thompson or Ralph Stanley her strong musical identity transports every tune to a very special place. — SS



Paul Jackson Jr., *Lay It Back*, (Branch Records)

A giant in R&B guitar, Jackson has played on hundreds of hit records. Here, he plays smooth jazz, and his playing is always soulful and right-on-the-money. It would, however, be nice to hear it stretch out a little more. Fine jazz workouts are sometimes muted by nods to radio-ready jazz. — JH



Ian Tyson, *Yellowhead to Yellowstone and Other Love Stories* (Stony Plain)

Though it mines further musical territory he has long claimed — tales of the West — here his roughed-up vocal chords sound like a piece of leather on an awl. The results take some time to adjust to, but add a new pathos to his songs. — SS



Danny O'Keefe, *In Time* (O'K) Best known for "Good-

time Charlie's Got The Blues," O'Keefe is a world-class songwriter and understated but captivating singer. Here, his acoustic gets sensitive support from Marty Stuart's mandolin, Victor Krauss' upright, Joel Tepp's slide, and producer Mick Conley's guitar. Inspired by Hurricane Katrina, this CD proves that some good things do come out of such tragedy. — DF