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Cindy Bullens - Dream #29 (Blue Lobster)



Those unfamiliar with Bullens who get round to reviewing her latest album will probably focus on the guests who put in appearances. Delbert McLinton joins her for the bluesy bar room *This Ain't Love*, Boston's Red Sox pitcher Tim Wakefield harmonises on the twangy country rocking *7 Days* and, the real celebrity spotter news, Elton John pumps piano on the swaggering boogie blues talker title track, reuniting a 70s relationship that saw Bullens providing back ups on three tours, the *Blue Moves* album and *Don't Go Breakin' My Heart*.

It's understandable that writers will spotlight such things, but what they really should be noting is that Bullens remains an underrated force and talent who, were it not for a litany of record label disasters and personal tragedies (her daughter died of cancer) would surely be accorded the same sort of respect and accolades as, say, Chrissie Hynde to whom she often bears comparison.

Joined by a band that includes Garry Tallent on bass and George Marinelli on guitars, this is a perfect tough n tender companion piece to the previous *Neverland*, the muscle and sinew evident from the get go with the slow burning rock of *Oriental Silk*, a country hued *Jellico Highway* where Bruce and Lucinda share the driving and the swaggeringly upbeat ringing *Pettyesque Box Of Broken Hearts*.

With its drawled spoken intro and Steve Earle delivery, *Love Letter From Las Vegas* perfectly underlines the fact that Bullens can mine the motherlode from rock country territory but it's arguably the slower, more heartaching numbers that really show her at her best. The chiming falling apart worlds apart relationship of *Too Close To The Sun* pulses with a quiet sorrow and the strummed, gradually building circular melody of *Mockingbird Hill* details how sometimes the most perfect looking facades can hide a world of hurt in a house that's home to pain.

However, the album's real diamond and the one where those Hynde comparisons really come to the surface is *Paper And Glass*, a plangently melodic song of loss in a photograph which

may refer back to her daughter, but should strike a chord with any heartbreak frozen inside a frame. With dreams like these, it's about time Bullens stopped being a snapshot in a favourite album and became part of music's bigger picture.

www.cindybullens.com

Mike Davies

Nice Price at Amazon.co.uk

Steven Lindsay - Exit Music (Seminal)



Originally released at the tail end of 2004 to critical acclaim but muted commercial success, the debut solo album by the former Big Dish frontman has been reissued with two bonus tracks in the hope the record buying climate may now be more sympathetic.

It's a muted, ambient affair steeped in a sparse meld of electronic beats, strings and piano over which Glaswegian Lindsay's rich, yearning vocals gracefully float and soar like a more strained Bono. Although there are times, Submarine and Midnight, when the musical pulse quickens the dominant tone here is one of understatement with tracks such as the dreamy Butterfly, November, Birdsong and Valentine rightly conjuring references to Coldplay, David Gray and Blue Nile. The all new Spread It brings a funkier late night spooked chill to Lindsay's cinematic palette while the other bonus cut is a classy reading of the classic First Time Ever I Saw Your Face that perfectly showcases his mesmerising voice. Hopefully this time, his Exit music will entrance a far bigger audience.

www.stevenlindsay.com

Mike Davies

Volebeats - Like Her (Torquoise Mountain)



Last time round this Detroit combo were serving up unlikely countrified jangly guitar covers of tracks by ABBA, Slayer and Funkadelic. This time they tip their hats firmly in the direction of their love for the reverb heavy 60s beat pop of Buddy Holly, Roy Orbison, The Beatles and The Everlys and trim them with a ribbon of alt-country. The title track is pure Merseybeat (though more Searchers than Lennon & McCartney), This Girl has a Pretty Woman beat while Here It Comes Again throws together Ennio Morricone, the Fortunes, Roger McGuinn and Phil Spector. You get the idea.

They count Ryan Adams among their most ardent supporters and he's co-penned Everytime here, another of the Searchers sing Jackie DeShannon soundalikes and just one of a glut of highlights (I'd also draw your ears' attention to the Velvetsish lullaby Oustide, the cosmic country September Spell, and honky tonker love song Touch Me One Time) on a sparkling fresh collection of retro pop that's arguably the best of the band's seven albums. Unpretentiously fabulous.

www.volebeats.com

Mike Davies

The River Detectives - King of the Ghost Train Ride (Neon Tetra)



It's a staggering 13 years since Sam Corry and Dan O'Neill released sophomore album *Elvis Has Left The Building*, but, four years after calling it a day the Motherwell duo have got bak together and dragged themselves back into a studio to record a third. Not a huge amount has changed in the interim, they still make acoustic based folk pop about love and journeys both literal and emotional, rippling with catchy melodies and lines about, well, trains. And they're still pretty damn good too.

A mixture of old songs and new material, some are written about life on the road, some (the Simon & Garfunkle like *Capetown To Glasgow* especially) about longing for home and some are very specific (*Philip* concerns a schoolfriend's suicide, *I Love Your Love* is about Corry's wife, *Speedy Mullen's House of Fear* relates to a dodgy Belfast IRA watering hole), but all of them testify to the strength of the writing and the harmonies that deliver them. To be honest, it's unlikely to return them to the heights they enjoyed with their silver selling debut album back in 1989, but if *The Proclaimers* can sustain a healthy career without the benefit of hit singles or albums, there's no reason why the likes of the catchy *Blue Collar Love Song* or the lovely country heartacher *The Dance Is Over* shouldn't ensure the river keeps flowing for a while yet.

www.theriverdetectives.com

Mike Davies

[Nice Price at Amazon.co.uk](#)

Pieta Brown - In The Cool (One Little Indian)



The daughter of folk singer Greg Brown, while there may be obvious musical bloodlines to be traced on tracks like *This Old Dress* (a hymn to traditional American family values with Iris DeMent on backing) and *Lonesome Songs* (with dad on guitar), Brown is much more steeped in the blues, her slide-guitar getting down and dirty on the hips-shaking title track, *Precious Game* a driving rocker, while *Tears Won't Do Any Good* is a good example of the old school smoky blues rocker clothes she clearly feels comfortable wearing.

She has the riffs and soulful groove, but she has the songwriter's eye too, *4th of July* a finely detailed snapshot of summer holidays set against thoughts about America, *#807* a sultry walk down the cracked pavements of early morning streets and *Ring of Gold* a Johnny Cash chugging journey through love and loss. This is her third album, it could well be the one that has people start prefacing Greg reviews by mentioning he's Pieta Brown's father.

www.pietabrown.com

Mike Davies

Holly Golightly - My First Holly Golightly Album (Damaged Goods)



If you sit through Jim Jarmusch's somewhat overrated film *Broken Flowers*, you may well find yourself roused from nodding off through Bill Murray's minimalist performance by the reedy voiced Ms Golightly (her real name, apparently) singing her version of The Kinks' *Tell Me Now So I Know* and thinking it's one of the best thing about the film. It may also spur you to discover more about the woman in question. Good news then that, while not actually including the track from the film (it's on the Decca soundtrack CD or her own *Slowly But Surely*), this compilation provides a 17 strong snapshot culled from her 13 solo albums, six of the numbers re-recorded for the occasion.

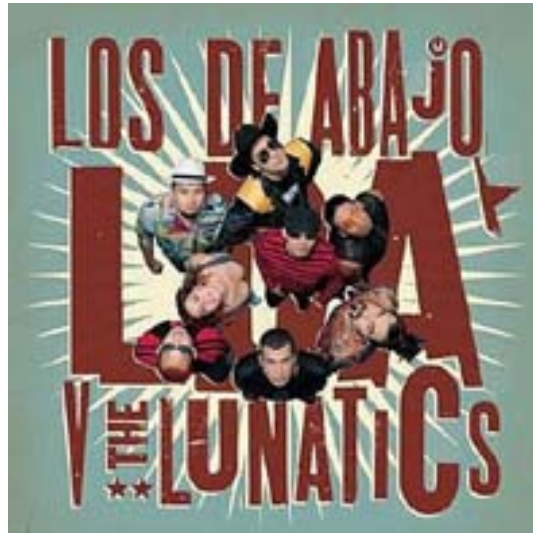
So, who is she and what does she do? Well, she used to be in Thee Headcoatees, the all girl garage band Thee Headcoats splinter outfit, then she made her solo debut in 1995 and has been pursuing her electric blues, folk rock, and r&b ever since, becoming big mates with The White Stripes along the way and duetting with them on *It's True That We Love One Another* on *Elephant*. So much for the brief resume, now you should get down to the business of actually hearing what she sounds like. To which end I'd point you in the direction of the acoustic blues *Black Night*, the organ driven soul blues *Wherever You Were* from her debut, Nancy Sinatra-ish retro hep cat pop *You Ain't No Big Thing*, her self-penned country blues *Walk A Mile* and the barrelhousing *An Eye For An Empty Heart* and her new psychedelic folk blues recording of folk chestnut *Sally Go Round The Roses*.

After listening to these and the others, while this may be your first Holly Golightly album, it most certainly won't be your last.

www.hollygolightly.com

Mike Davies

Los De Abajo - LDA Versus The Lunatics (Real World)



Remember Fun Boy Three's perky platter *The Lunatics Have Taken Over The Asylum*? Well this new CD from the celebrated mestizo outfit LDA (their third, I gather) brings a vibrant punk salsa/tropipunk aggregation to 15 tracks including two different takes on that very 1982 Specials-offshoot curio. This highly contemporary Mexican sound, derived from a sub-culture of modern-day ska fans, also brings in a spicy wash of other musical styles from across the continent and beyond. That means cool hip-hop and brassy salsa, dub and twang as well as cumbia and polka, and even more traditional Mexican styles like banda, conjunto, norteño and mariachi. And one of the bonus tracks even features Natacha Atlas! To listeners unversed in Mexicana the CD will seem a bewildering, if at times breathtaking, headlong parade of rousing, if perhaps partly incomprehensible music. Even with more than a passing familiarity with some of them, I'll admit to being more than fazed on first acquaintance, and I had to learn to expect the unexpected (though this wasn't helped by the fact that my PC kept frustratingly insisting on engaging RealPlayer mode and either only playing the first track on repeat or skipping the very tracks I wanted to select, with error messages claiming a fault on the disc itself!) But once I'd gone past those hurdles, I found this a sturdy, spicy and invigorating experience, strong on Rude Boy charisma and upfront, fearless energy and excitement.

www.losdeabajo.com

www.realworldrecords.com

David Kidman

Catfish Keith @ The State Bar, Glasgow, 26th October 2005



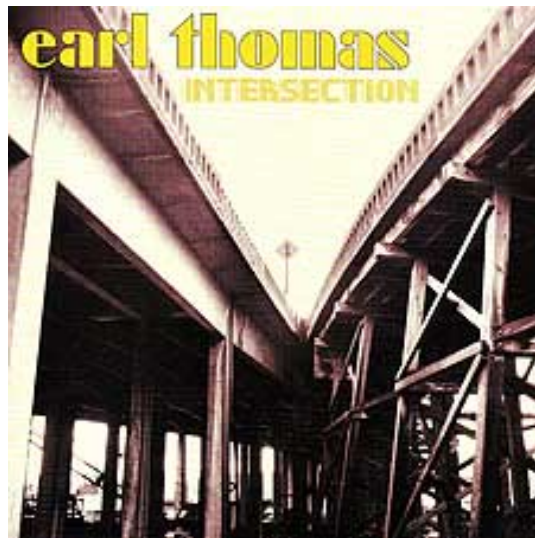
A small crowd of about 80 blues enthusiasts and virgins packed into the sauna that is the State Bar to hear the acoustic slide blues virtuoso Catfish Keith. I've known about Catfish since his Pepper In My Shoe album, some 10 years ago, but this is the first time that I've seen him live. I was standing next to someone who has seen him 6 times before and makes a point of trying to see him every time that he comes to Scotland and the show was staged by my good friend, Radiotones frontman Dave Arcari. With recommendations such as those I knew that I was in for a good time. Catfish did not disappoint and provided an evening of excellent originals and standards of the highest class. His easy going style wowed the crowd and that's not an easy thing to do to a Glasgow crowd.

Two hours of classy bottleneck blues began with Gonna Get My Hambone Boiled from his latest album, Sweet Pea. He played at least two other songs from the new album, Salty Thang and A True Friend Is Hard To Find, both destined to be favourites for some time. His back catalogue was raided to great effect on songs such as She's A Hum Dum Dinger From Dingersville, I'm Going To See The King and Roll You In My Arms (Like A Wagon Wheel) from the Rolling Sea album, the two highlights of the night – Eagle Bird and Dark Was The Night, Cold Was The Ground from Twist It, Babe which were listened to in almost reverential silence, Jitterbug Swing from the album of the same name and Knockin' Myself Out, Pepper In My Shoe and You Got To Move from the Pepper In My Shoe album. When you are playing covers of songs by Jessie Mae Hemphill, Blind Willie Johnson, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Mississippi Fred McDowell, The Otis Brothers and Jimmie Davis you had better be sure of your talent; Catfish Keith certainly is. Glasgow is a sadder place for him going on to continue his tour in the rest of the UK. If you can catch the Catfish, do so!

www.catfishkeith.com

David Blue

Earl Thomas - Intersection (Memphis International)



Earl Thomas' second album for Memphis International covers his background in blues and soul whilst adding a few other styles into the melting pot. He's spread his wings a little and has some serious backing. The opener, *Workin' Together*, was written by Ike Turner who rates Thomas very highly. By coincidence, Thomas only took up music because of Turner's performance in the film *Soul To Soul*. So, mutual appreciation all round! The sentiment of the song is perfect for today but the ideals are a little unobtainable. *The Higher Ground (Everything Is Alright)* was written by the Danish duo, Emil Soegaard and Assi Roar, who contributed to his first album. The result is an uplifting and very optimistic song. Next up is *The Bright Side Of You (Let Me See)*, also written by the Danish song-smiths, and Thomas sets loose the husky side to his voice as opposed to the crystal clear delivery that is prevalent on the rest of the album. They call this bluerosofunk (blues/rock/soul/funk) and they're not too far off the mark on this slow burner and it's very difficult to pigeonhole, as is the rest of the album.

There are a couple of famous covers on the album and the first is Marc Bolan's *Get It On*, renamed *Bang A Gong*. Thomas funks this up and had Marc Bolan been around at a different time and maybe been American then this is possibly how he would have played it. Thomas has been a fan of Marc Bolan for some time and it shows. Steve Selvidge deserves special mention for his guitar solo on this. *Sweet Like Sugar* is another that's hard to categorise. It's a little bit funk, a little bit soul and he's backed by some Memphis heavyweights on this one. Earl turns in one of his most powerful vocal performances on *The Lucky One*, a bluesy soul offering that has Hammond B3 and horns aplenty. *Life Of My Broken Heart* was written by Jeff Paris who has, in his time, written for Jeffrey Osborne, Mr. Big and Rod Stewart. This is chart rock and little else.

No Two Wrongs was co-written by Earl Randle, a real Memphis heavyweight, and Maurice Williams did the music but it's no more than middle of the road soul even though it is sung so well. *Your Daddy's Eyes* is American soul sung by a man who is coming into his own as a vocalist and one who has grown in the past two years. To finish with, Earl chooses to take on *Brown Sugar* – yes, The Rolling Stones! This is given a funky up, bluesy treatment that is

slower than the original but the horns come into their own here and there's a big drumming performance from Edward 'Hot' Cleveland.

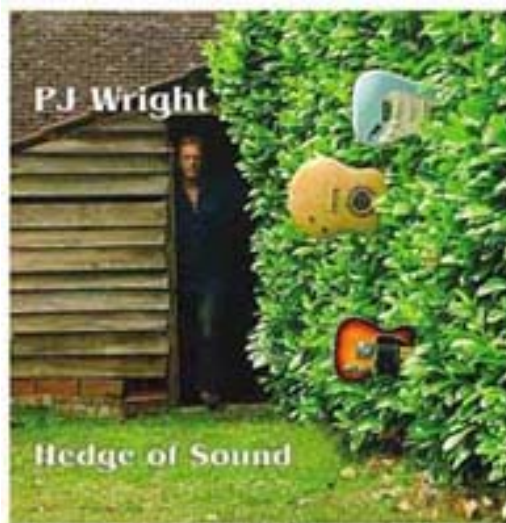
This is a smooth, professional album by a performer of whom Ike Turner says, "I'll tell you something I really believe. I think this guy is going to make it, not even if he's given half a chance; he'll make it if he only gets a bitty spot of a chance and that ain't no bull".

www.memphisinternationalrecords.com

www.earlthomasblues.com

David Blue

PJ Wright - Hedge of Sound (Hedge of Sound)



He's backed Bobby Vee and Del Shannon, he spent the 80s and 90s as lead guitarist for Steve Gibbons, he's part of the Dylan Project with Gibbons and Fairporters Pegg, Nicol and Conway and for the past six year's he fronted Little Johnny England. So, it's about time the Leicester born musician got round to making a solo album.

Given his background, it's pretty much what you'd expect with largely self-penned folk-rock inclined songs and socio-politically concerned lyrics about the working man and the daily grind with the odd relationship number for good measure.

With guest musicians that include Anna Ryder, Dave Pegg, Gareth Turner and Ric Sanders, it's a solid rather than stunning album but that's by no means a put down. There's three instrumentals, a clumpingly fine Nether Bagwash suite, the gentle acoustic guitar tune Madeleine and the rustic slow air Peter Brown's fancy which spotlights Sanders on violin while

Wait For The Whistle To Blow (a lament about the nine to five life) is a feisty little number straight out of the LJE while Random Acts of Kindness (which nicks the line 'how can a poor man stand such times and live") could easily slip into a Fairport set without you noticing the join. Maritime tales wash up with Pete Scowther's Lily Of Barbary (a tale of slave made good finding true romance) and Indisputable Thing, a song of love, dreams and growing old that sounds a lot like Tom Robinson.

On the downside, shifting from boats to trains, Electric Railway's a bit of a misfire, a sluggish blues rock number that definitely doesn't warrant its instrumental reprise as the closing track while Going Up Leicester, a scratchy acoustic blues about taking the Hinkley bus to buy a pork fat bread roll, sung in authentic - and impenetrable - Leicester accent should probably have been left as the idea down the pub it probably began life as. The hedge could have done with some judicious pruning, but there's still some fine foliage here.

www.hedgeofsound.com

Mike Davies

Joy Lynn White - One More Time (Thortch Recordings)



If anyone doubts that Joy Lynn White was born to sing the kind of emotion-twisting songs that appear on One More Time, they should go straight to Love Sometimes or the album's final and title track for absolute proof. If you are not deeply affected by the intensity of them, then I'm afraid your soul is in more danger than Joy Lynn White's and that's saying something because she's released an album that can only be described as up close and personal.

Be warned, *One More Time* is an intense, draining experience. The tracks on it are not the product of some pleasant afternoon spent in a songwriter's circle, they are ripped bloody and bleeding from the very centre of a broken heart. Like all true artists Joy Lynn White has chipped away at the edifice of her life and offered the results up for public scrutiny. *One More Time* strengthens the suspicion that musicians like White are certainly different from us and probably a little madder. What on earth drives them to reveal as much as *I'm Free* does and then make it known to all and sundry, I have no idea but I'm damn glad she did.

If you're looking for label then *One More Time* is a country rock album but it's what Joy Lynn White has woven onto that bald label that creates the magic, although perhaps magic is the wrong word because *One More Time* is an album wracked with pain, White's voice closes around the heartache and cossets and cuddles it.

The thumping intro to the optimistically titled *Keep This Love*, flatters to deceive because this is a searing song of angry resignation and sets the tone for much of what follows, 'All the leaves are turning colour and you're a leaf that's turning too' tells a different, darker, truer story. Even *I'm Free* has the air of a woman trying to convince herself and others that all is well and not being too successful at it, while the 50s diner rock n roll of *Certain Boy* ends with a twist, 'What's his name?' is answered by 'Can't tell you', she can't tell you because she doesn't know, and the suspicion is left that these may be the dreams of a spurned lover.

Joy Lynn while is an open and honest writer, *Girls With Apartments* in Nashville lays bare the romantic notions that non musicians have of the life of an artist. Fiction: They go to Nashville, get a contract and all is set fair. Fact: 'they drive beat up old cars, ride around with their guitars in the back seat, they have their dreams'. Throughout *One More Time* Joy Lynn White places herself fairly and squarely on the front line.

Although she skilfully reaches in and places your emotions in a vice-like grip, Joy Lynn White is no crumbling, tragic heroine sitting at home with tissues and old episodes of Oprah, the album slowly, subtly and surely turns winter of discontent into glorious summer. *Looking For You*, *Looking For Me* is a gentle song full of hope. It conjures up images of looking through a steamed-up, rainy window. The images it casts back may not be all happy ones but it has a certainty that better times lie ahead and *Good Rockin' Mama* speaks eloquently and passionately for itself. Sit it on the shelf next to *I Am What I Am* as twin bastions of fresh start and defiance. |As a country singer Joy Lynn White will have her equals, although I doubt whether she will have many peers. As a writer her equals will be fewer and further between and her peers non-existent.

www.joylynnwhite.com

Michael Mee

Perry Keyes - Meter (Laughing Outlaw Records)

The only other cabbie I know of with a 'hidden' talent, was Fred Housego who won Mastermind back in the days when it was chaired by Magnus Magnusson. That list has just doubled with the inclusion of Sydney taxi driver and, far more importantly, talented singer/songwriter Perry Keyes. After listening to his excellent debut album, Meter, quite why he is still employing Australia's version of The Knowledge is a mystery. I suspect that once Meter comes to the attention of public and critics alike, if you ring for Perry Keyes and he says, 'I'm just turning into your street' don't believe him, his cabbying days are surely numbered.

Meter is a songwriter's album, that's not to say that Keyes the singer doesn't do the songs justice, he does. In fact the strength of Beer and Cigarettes, for example, is that it's being expressed by the man who wrote it and experienced it. However the writing is so expressive and honest that it's that which dominates.

There's a wonderfully fragmented feel to Meter. Nowhere on the album is there the sense that these songs were particularly written to go together for commercial reasons. The suspicion is that it's a double album so that Perry Keyes can bring the listener up to date with his life and work in one go. Within that 'framework' (or more correctly lack of) there is a kind of chronology. The first four songs of side one are full of the angst and urgency of youth. The appeal of 2nd Time I Saw You is derived from its slightly self-conscious awkwardness, it captures perfectly the universal fumbblings of young love.

Having completed the pubescent catharsis with the towering Some Aches, a more rounded and surer Perry Keyes emerges like a butterfly from a chrysalis. The next 'section' sees a musician that would fit right into the cynical and acerbic world of 80s new wave Britain, a fact epitomised by the definitely Costello-esque (Elvis not Lou) Vicious Left Hook.

But the journey is only half done and disc 2 exposes an ever-maturing Perry Keyes, here is a musician aware of what it is he wants to say and how he wants to say it.

On Fairfield Girl, Perry Keyes casts his eyes West, or in his case East and as the album unfolds he moves from introspection to Americana. For Perry Keyes, Meter is all about beginnings, it shows an insightful, intelligent and intuitive writer and a musician who refuses to submerge his own songs in a sea of over production. He has left Meter pretty much as nature intended, at times it is positively minimalist and the better for it.

His cabbying days may be drawing to a close but Perry Keyes's musical future is bright.

www.perrykeyes.com

Tom Kimmel @ Cabbage Patch, Twickenham, 16th October 2005

"I may give you my version 'Bohemian Rhapsody' yet!" Tom Kimmel smiled as the distant raucous mercurial sounds from the Cabbage Patch's other crowd of singers (a small group of Rugby enthusiasts) seeped into the live music backroom area. Instead though, he performed a stunning set of his own material – much of which has been covered by the likes of Johnny Cash, Linda Ronstadt, Buddy Mondlock, Waylon Jennings and Nanci Griffith. One of the more unlikely covers is currently in the UK album Top Ten via the classical teenage tonsils of Hayley Westenra. Tom lives in Nashville, although, born in Memphis and raised in Alabama, his musical influences stem, in part, from listening to the eclectic sounds heard on the 'Big Bam' Montgomery radio station. His mother was a strong influence through her love of Elvis, Sinatra, Brenda Lee and church hymns. Tom opened with the uptempo driving love song 'Bigger Than The Both Of Us', his voice resonant with the melodic gruff beauty associated with the likes of Dennis Locorriere and Bob Seger. Tom wrote many of his early successes with his first wife, Jennifer Kimball and the next two in his Twickenham set were the first of several co-writes featured. 'History', is a tender country ballad with the wistful chorus '*Baby, we're history – water under the bridge.*' Next we were treated to one of Tom's finest – the beautiful gospel-flavoured 'The Blue Train' with its freight-train chugging verse and smooth melodic chorus. Already the Cabbage Patch audience harmonies were on the rise!

Two of Tom's musical icons, Johnny Cash and Waylon Jennings, came together in the late 70s to record the Kimmel song 'Heroes'. Tom sings this as a heartfelt plea for good men to rise up and also as a paean to past greats. As he hit the song's high notes, the spine-tingle factor was well into play. Another co-writer, for whom Tom has great respect, is Lisa Aschmann. Together they produced 'If I Fell From Grace With You', an intense melodic ballad from the 'I-couldn't-live-without-you' mould. Tom sang this classically constructed song with a soulful commitment that artists such as Roberta Flack injected into their material. Tom Prasada-Rao, a long-term friend of Kimmel's, helped Tom create their heartfelt comment on homelessness – 'See Myself In You', clearly influenced in style by the hymns he learned as a child. 'Angels' (no – nothing to do with Robbie!) has a special meaning as Tom and Jennifer performed this at an awards ceremony in the early 90s, where Nanci Griffith was present in the audience. On the strength of what she saw, Nanci invited Tom to open for her on her next world tour. Coincidentally the song also appears on Nanci's current 2005 album. Tom sang again with simple conviction '*Darkness cannot reach us. Let the angels teach us – only love remains.*' His tender melodic rasp perfectly fitted the beauty of this inspirational song.

One or two malt whiskeys later, Tom began the second half with an unaccompanied poem, taken from his first anthology due out in the UK in January 2006 ('The Sweetest And The

Meanest'). Simply entitled 'My Cat', Tom recounted the tale of a beloved rascally family member in a winning, easy style. How many of us really do know *'the difference between playing and fighting, between kissing and biting'*?! Another of Tom's friends and fellow songwriters is Pierce Pettis. Both know Alabama well and have written of life's struggles there. In 'Love is not To Blame', Tom eloquently describes the struggles in late 60s' Alabama with care and clarity. Following another fine country ballad, 'Hearts Are Bound To Be Broken', richly melodic and gently strummed, we reached another classic from the Kimmel pen. This he co-wrote with the musician Buddy Mondlock, who helped finish Tom's original sketch. The result is a powerful tale of severed love - 'Poetic Justice' - and justice is exactly what Tom gave it: a spellbinding version, loudly cheered by the appreciative crowd at the Patch.

Although visiting the UK in an unusually dry English autumn week, Tom is wise to UK rain which he compared to Tennessee downpours in the delightful metaphoric love song "That's What I Love About Rain", another Aschmann co-write. In 1999 Tom's love of gospel music was rewarded when he recorded one of his songs with the legendary 70-year-spanning spiritual outfit The Fairfield Four. Tom's bass player had recently produced an album for them and Tom 'auditioned' (!) for them to accompany him on 'The Crying Ground'. The Cabbage Patch crowd readily joined in as Tom gave a powerful rendition of this contemporary soul searcher. Hayley Westenra, the latest teenage classical singing sensation, is an unlikely artist to cover a Kimmel confection, yet, on her top-selling album, she turns in a unique performance of his co-write 'Never Saw Blue Like That', which Tom penned with Jeff Franzel and Mark Luna. Shawn Colvin had previously used it on the soundtrack of the film 'Runaway Bride'. Tom's melodic version came across with a master craftsman's touch and conviction.

For his final offering Tom gave us a song that Randy Travis recorded on his 2000 'Inspirational Journey' album - 'Shallow Water'. In a secular sense the lyrics echo its experienced writer's own musical journey and strong determination:

*'I will not drown in shallow water, not with your love within my reach
I did not come this far to falter and will not rest until I'm free.'*

As an encore, Tom produced the only cover of his entire set, prefacing it with a dedication to his wife and young daughter; fitting that he should close the night with a gentle reflective lullaby - Jesse Winchester's 'Lay Down Your Burden'. For two hours and more, the Twickenham crowd were more than happy to lay their burdens down and be soothed and entranced by a fine Southern gentleman with a sweet lyric and a captivating voice. The rhapsodies may not have been Bohemian but no-one in the folk club would deny they are amongst the finest on offer from Nashville today.

www.tomkimmel.com

Simon Beards

Eileen Rose - Come The Storm (Banana)

Jim Causley - Fruits Of The Earth (WildGoose Studios) Jim, who hails from Devon, is one of the current crop of young revival singers who's been making a name for himself at folk festivals over the past couple of years. So far, his only appearance on CD has been on Martyn Wyndham-Read's epic Song Links 2 project (reviewed for NetRhythms earlier this year). Either he seems to have sprung fully-formed out of nowhere, or else has waited till good and ready before venturing into the recording studio; whichever might or might not be truer, his singing on Fruits Of The Earth is certainly pretty impressive and yes, already warm and mature. What you notice immediately in Jim's singing is its intrinsic sturdiness, its assurance of phrasing and pacing, which makes for compelling listening. There's a distinctive resonance to Jim's voice, and an individual timbral feature that I can best describe, albeit perhaps not altogether adequately, as a wheezy overtone (or is it undertone?) around a certain register/part of his vocal range which might occasionally be a slight distraction, but this isn't ever a barrier to appreciating Jim's interpretations of traditional songs, which make up the bulk of his debut CD. These are palpably considered interpretations which have been properly sung-in - and of that we're not left in any doubt, due in large measure to Jim's solid, confident, relaxedly forthright and nicely unfussy delivery. The slight drawback to his evenness of tone, appealing though it is, is that he may very occasionally miss the expressive dovetailing of elements of the stories he's telling in song; this can be especially true of the lighter, more frolicsome ones like The Lusty Young Smith (however, having seen Jim perform this and other more comic songs live, this may be more of a studio reticence than a lack of innate response). Just two out of the 13 tracks on this CD are performed acappella, the majority of the remainder sung to Jim's accordion (one of those trusty Hohner diatonic models) or, on some songs, the fiddle of John Dipper and/or the harmony vocals, guitar or mandolin of James Dumbelton (formerly of Waulk Elektrik). Perhaps the No Man's Band connection was already in my mind when I heard in Jim's relaxed, lyrical pacing of songs like Tan Yard Side a distinct hint of Martyn Wyndham-Read, though there were also occasions when I was put in mind of Tony Rose. Enjoyable though the jauntier-paced songs are, and effective though Jim is in tripping lightly and effortlessly through the patter of words, I really like the darker, slower, more brooding pieces best, such as the opening track, a doughty unaccompanied version of John Barleycorn which conveys a real sense of drama in its carefully measured pace (interestingly, the first two tracks on the CD both have a fol-de-rol chorus/refrain!). I also loved the sinister "apocryphal carol" The Carnal And The Crane (for which Jim composed his own "weird" tune), and the mournfully beautiful Yonders Hill (on the latter I got much the same frisson as when I first encountered the singing of Damien Barber, who is blessed with a similarly rich vocal timbre). The CD also brings us two of Jim's own songs, including the strangely moving "random reflection" Rewind; clearly a direction worth pursuing. I fully expect Jim's next solo release (ie not counting the forthcoming Devil's Interval collaboration with Emily Portman and Lauren McCormick) to be a stunner. For the moment, though, Fruits Of The Earth is fine to be going on with (although - and this is probably a trivial matter in the overall scheme of things - I'm not entirely convinced that Jim needs to resort to attention-grabbing computer-wizard-generated cover photography to endear folks to his product, since his music stands up perfectly well on its own merits). www.WildGoose.co.uk

Eileen Rose - Come The Storm (Banana)

Tamrah Aeryn - Typical Gurl (Liquid Noise/Massacre Records) Tamrah's a Wisconsin-based singer-songwriter, whose style is described on the press handout, rather optimistically, as "spanning the range between folk-rock and alternative music". But, at the risk of being uncharitable, Tamrah sounds for all the world like a less jerky Kate Bush tryout largely drained of Kate's innate creativity. Efficiently-played yet curiously soulless classical-style proto-pomp piano arabesques or fancy keyboard flourishes underpin many of her songs, which could have been disgorged from any rock era since the 80s. Her lyrics are often all but obscured by the over-busy, often pompously overblown arrangements, so only by perusing the lavish accompanying booklet do you get a measure of Tamrah's songwriting prowess (such that it is). Overly often, too, is the sound of Tamrah's rather mannered voice over-produced - too much reverb, speed enhancement, other intrusive production gimmicks brought in (it would seem) just to give the impression of "gurl-power" maybe. And yes, that title track is an example of dire lyrics direly managed, and what about "love is an easy bed bed bed/when it's not made up in my head head head"? Then with the ensuing Mr. Doublepersonality ("Why you say we can't connect/I don't know respect so I suspect that maybe it's cause I can't write a real rock song" - hmm...), you really do begin to despair! Much of Tamrah's writing verges on the plain embarrassing. Sure, there are some attractive enough moments (purely musically), and the first track (Soundboat) is reasonably bearable, as is the Ultravox-like Distant, while Weak is redeemed by a more restrained flowing arrangement, but even these moments can't salvage the somewhat lazy sub-prog groove that weights the whole CD down generally. Unfortunately I'm quite tempted almost to the view that Tamrah's only redeeming feature is her (Farscape-inspired?) surname. www.tamrah.net

Eileen Rose - Come The Storm (Banana)

The Irish-Italian American singer-songwriter's last album, Long Shot Novena, took several departures from the alt-country style of her debut with tracks variously evoking the Velvet, Dylan and Tom Waits. Now, freshly signed to a new label, the follow-up continues that eclectic approach. Numbers here range from jaunty twanging power pop (Last New Year's Eve) and piano ballad jazz lounge torch (Saffron & Ginger) to scratchy drumtracked rhumbas (Never Be The Same) and swaggering rockabilly (White Wave).

Informed by her return from the UK to live in America after 9/11, there's also a lot of reflectiveness and soul-searching twining around the lyrics of such songs as Nothing But Blue's

swampy back alley blues questioning of divine existence, Stagger Home's hymn to the security of your backyard in days of uncertainty and misguided patriotism, and the themes of mortality that inform *Time To Go* and *Staying In*.

Working with a tight band that includes new husband Seth Goodman on guitars, it's a solidly mature work that, for all the suggestion of downbeat melancholy to the concerns it addresses, still burns with an intense, vibrant passion for life.

www.eileenrose.co.uk

Mike Davies

Iarla Ó Lionáird - Invisible Fields (Real World)

The press release states that Iarla, "one of Ireland's finest singers", "carries echoes of the ancients with harbingers of the global sounds of the future". And of course Iarla's one of the vocalists with the pioneering Afro Celt Sound System collective. But just stop right there, jettison all preconceptions, for this is no mechanised zombie-chillout package but instead a very natural-sounding record in many respects, in spite of the occasional use of electronic or gently ambient textures; there are no pounding club beats or DJ mixes here. Iarla's singing style springs from the Irish sean nós tradition, yet his approach to repertoire is decidedly personal and encompasses significantly more than just the works of his tradition, although his own writing is clearly deeply informed by its wellspring. Iarla considers *Invisible Fields* to be among other things a love song to the Irish language, and as such it reflects his pride in it. Additionally, two of the tracks are directly inspired by the singing of Iarla's great-aunt, Elizabeth Cronin. In amongst the lightly experimental sounds and textures, the CD includes five examples of arrangements of traditional song – there's a fine rendition of *Taimse Im' Chodladh* for instance, and *An Buachaillin Ban* is given a sympathetic and sparsely textured acoustic guitar-based setting; Iarla's mastery of the sean nós technique is apparent throughout, most especially perhaps on the unaccompanied *I'm Weary Of Lying Alone*. The whole CD, in fact, is a most persuasive advocacy of the transformative power of song and nature. There's a "derivation" (*Aurora*) inspired by a cosmological poem by Iarla's West Cork neighbour Sean Ó Riordain, and the final track distils sampled birdsong within a gently brooding soundscape, whereas *Oisín's Dream* is a disturbing, nightmarish electronics-enhanced auditory vision. *Tuirimh Mhic Fhinín Dhuibh* is a wonderfully inventive collaborative arrangement with album producer Kieran Lynch and post-minimalist composer Gavin Bryars, an ancient lament that's "dark as hell" with the shining black light conjured up by the viola da gambas of the Concordia ensemble. The remainder of the non-traditional items are Iarla's own compositions, some co-written with Kieran and/or one or other member of his small supporting cast (Caroline Dale, Graham Henderson). Of these, the album's emotional centrepiece is probably the tender *The Day That You Were*

Born, written for his daughter Éabha. Cryptically, the press release also sort-of-mentions Iceland's Sigur Rós and Norwegian duo Röyksopp, but this may be in the context of a loose comparative reference point only, I'm not sure... There is much that is genuinely groundbreaking on this release, although you do need to open your ears (the closest comparison I can make is with Martin Swan's Mouth Music albums); just don't expect a traditional-sounding record, and you'll be magnificently rewarded by *Invisible Fields'* unique kind of intense beauty.

www.realworldrecords.com/iarla

David Kidman

Chris Wood - The Lark Descending (Ruf Records)

I plead guilty of hanging onto this one for a few weeks, purely because I've listened through several times but always got interrupted each time I started the review, then lost the thread! It's not an easy CD to describe tho', for reasons I can't quite fathom. It's neither a traditional album, nor a contemporary one; it embodies elements of both, yet... Chris is best known for his long years of working in small groups and ensembles on or near the fringes of the traditional folk scene - notably in tandem with Martin Carthy and/or Andy Cutting, and latterly with the somewhat forbiddingly-named English Acoustic Collective (whose CD *Ghosts* I reviewed here a few months back). *The Lark Descending* (catchy title that! - with its reverse-echoes of Vaughan Williams' rhapsodic approach to English folksong) is actually an exceptional release in very many ways. Although it's a genuinely solo outing on Chris's part, and accompaniments (predominantly on guitar) are unobtrusive with textures admirably lean and sparse, just a few of the tracks involve a modest modicum of multitracking - guitar or fiddle being augmented by an altogether darker-toned member of the string family, very possibly a viola (though mildly infuriatingly the box credits merely state "all instruments and voices Chris Wood") to produce an overall rich texture (surprisingly so, in fact) that complements Chris's deep-toned voice (which itself is occasionally overdubbed in close harmony, to beguiling effect). It's a deceptively dour-sounding album at times, but the essentially serious quality of its expression draws the listener in (at times much in the decidedly minimalist way that Alasdair Roberts does, I thought). Just three of the album's eight tracks are arrangements of traditional songs: the best of these is a stunning rendition of *Our Captain Calls (All Hands)*, accompanied only by fiddle, on which Chris's vocal skills are demonstrably second to none (his is a compelling technique that always manages to bring the melody back in line after an often intriguing and ostensibly quite wayward journey). Chris's chosen version of *John Barleycorn*, while clearly inspired by the Carthy treatment, is nonetheless no disgrace, and he also turns in a not-quite-epic rendition of *Lord Bateman*. The latter I namecheck mainly because it's upstaged by the track immediately following, a delightful original composition by Hugh Lupton that (rather cheekily?!) uses the

Bateman name at the outset for one of its characters; One In A Million is a true modern-day ballad (a bit of a cinematic epic in terms of length and scope), told in unpretentious language, that exerts a simple yet profound emotional pull on the listener. It's one of the CD's standout tracks, another being Bleary Winter (also a Lupton composition), where Chris's almost jazzy approach to a flexible vocal line strongly reminds me of a lower-register Robert Wyatt. Walk This World With Music is a drone-laden, modern-day yet timeless-sounding wassailing song that builds layers of sound into almost a mantra. Then - last but definitely not least - I must mention Albion, a sombre-hued song by Chris himself which recounts an episode when he and his son found a young man hanging from a tree branch, also reflecting pithily on the state of modern society and the unbelievable paradox of feeling "homesick now though I live in the town where I was born" - a powerful statement that. As is the whole of this CD, which - impressively - reveals more in the nuances of its bald soundscape than many a more layered product.

www.EnglishAcousticCollective.org.uk

David Kidman

Robin Laing - Ebb And Flow (Whistleberry)

Robin's sixth album (and his first not for Greentrax) kickstarts this new Songwriters' Cooperative record label in fine style, and - appropriately given the label's implied mission statement - is the first so far to consist entirely of Robin's own compositions. The 14 quality songs range typically widely in subject-matter, from historical (The Covenanters' Grave, Jamie Penman) to romantic love (I Believe In You), a joyous celebration of the birth of his daughter Maisie (Born In The Blossom Time) to a story of vampirism (The Bloofer Lady). There's also an allegorical look at the essence of islands and how we all feel drawn to them (Islands). Robin also provides a thread of continuity with his earlier work in presenting the fourth of his continuing series of songs about Ulysses (The Lotus Eaters), which proves a definite highlight of this CD. But at least five or six of these new songs come up there with Robin's best, and there's no weak track, so the whole CD is a persuasive portrait of his developing and maturing craft. Perhaps the only thing missing from this new collection is an example of Robin's puckish sense of fun, one of those wittily humorous ditties he excels in (Black Coffee comes closest here, and almost compensates for the lack of a whisky-derived opus on this occasion!). Ebb And Flow is actually a deceptively laid-back album, belying the intellectual depth of its contents, but the gentle power of Robin's voice (and guitar) perfectly matched by the cleverly-judged musical arrangements of producer Davie Scott (this is his third album collaboration with Robin in fact), which though generally quite uncluttered, are richer than you might expect, with especially imaginative use of keyboards to evoke or reproduce specific instrumental timbres (French horn, harpsichord, cello, sitar, etc.). I'd be lying, though, if I didn't honestly admit that there are times when I yearned to hear some of these new songs in a simpler garb, for however attractive these studio settings

may be there's an element (albeit quite minor) of artificiality or obfuscation for which the only antidote is to go and see Robin perform the material live and solo for maximum immediacy and intimacy - well, I feel sure this is Robin's intention! But I'd stress that this latter observation is very much relative, and only significant in relation to my own having followed Robin's developing career over the years since Edinburgh Skyline days and having been fortunate enough to see him perform live on many occasions. Helpfully, too, the CD presentation is excellent; the accompanying booklet reproduces all song texts, and Robin's website gives several pages of fascinating detail of the stories behind the songs. All in all, this is definitely another fine and delicately satisfying album from Robin.

www.robinlaing.com

David Kidman

Tom Clelland - Life Goes On (Whistleberry)

Tom's debut CD Little Stories appeared around four years ago on Shoeshine Records' Spit & Polish imprint, and I recall it as a fine collection showing more than just initial promise from this East Lothian singer and songwriter. Where had he been prior to that? I asked myself - probably listening to such country-roots greats as Guy Clark and John Prine (by whom he's obviously been influenced, but not derivatively so). But amazingly, even now, his songwriting CV only stretches back a mere six years! Little Stories was good, very good in fact, and I've found myself returning to key tracks quite often, but Life Goes On is significantly better, and not only in its strong element of consistency-within-variety. In changing labels and coming on board the new Whistleberry artists' cooperative, Tom's landed squarely on his feet. He's been able to benefit from the production skills of Davie Scott and his hand-picked crew of backing musicians, who are used sparingly but always convincingly to provide easy-rolling backdrops for Tom's warm voice and songs on guitars, mandolin, dobro, pedal steel, occasional keyboards, bass and softly-spoken percussion. Delicacy of expression and filigree playing are the perfect counterpoint for Tom's ever-thoughtful compositions, which infuse reflectiveness on universal or Scottish themes with the folksy spirit of Americana. Listen to A Day Like This, written at the heart of a Scottish winter, and you'll hear what I mean; or the beautifully-voiced resonances of The Wind, She Changed and the final cut Slip Away (now there's an ideal set closer). The Wine Song is a kind of lazy-ragtime reflection on the glorious act of imbibing inspired by (and taking further) Sir Walter Scott's dictum - methinks it wouldn't be out of place on a future Robin Laing themed album! Two further standout cuts are Sky Like A Hammer and Stormclouds At A Distance, where autumnal instrumental colours are utilised to mirror quite different situations: one historical ("Scotland's curse" from a post-Culloden perspective), and one rather more personal (the shifting restlessness of a man unable to commit to a relationship). Overall, there's not a weak cut, and Tom's songs are classy creations that stick in the mind and feel

comfortingly familiar on second hearing, then like old friends on third. Fourth listen on, I can't wrestle the CD from the player - it's that addictive, honest!

www.tomclelland.com

David Kidman

Peter Nardini - Rain Din (Whistleberry)

The third in the initial batch of releases from this new Songwriters' Cooperative record label is a bit of an enigma, for it has so far sharply polarised critical opinion. Peter Nardini is an award-winning painter based in Lanarkshire, who also happens to be a singer-songwriter with a certain degree of cult status. This may be due to the (obstinately?) stark, minimal presentation Peter uses on this CD (his third, it turns out) - just guitar, voice and harmonica. The album's very title proves a creative pun - Peter's talent is "reined-in" to this restricted palette... A very direct comparison with early Dylan isn't misplaced, as Peter's slightly nasal vocal delivery and his distinct penchant for irregular line-lengths both reinforce. But Peter's painter's-eye-gift for storytelling brings some curiously tender insights as well as some sharply-observed vignettes and imaginatively poetic commentary. The lyricism of Peter's world-view is conveyed with a remarkably compelling economy and an often surreal turn of phrase (there's another point of comparison with early Dylan) - but you do need to listen closely and get yourself past what some listeners will consider the biggest turn-off, the relative lack of melodic content in Peter's songs (and yes, that was a barrier for non-converts to early Dylan too!). There's a bleak Leonard-Cohen-like demeanour to Bright-Eyed Boy, but (like his unintentional model) this isn't depressing music; rather, it's very much life-affirming. I'll apologise to Peter for any labouring of the Dylan comparisons, but quite honestly no review could truthfully ignore these reference points; however, please don't dismiss Peter as a mere Dylan clone, for what's striking is that Peter transcends this potentially merely superficial congruence by making us listeners really pay attention to the plights of his protagonists, to appreciate their innermost feelings and thoughts by dint of what I can only describe as a more intensely personal delivery (ie Peter's singing to you rather than at you?). Rain Din breaks the usual singer-songwriter-album mould in that more than a handful of its songs are genuinely top-drawer material - and there are two uncredited bonus tracks appended at the end of the CD, one of which proves Peter's got a good grasp of f** (I mean fun) too! So don't just give Peter a cursory listen, do persist - his songs are worth it.

www.peternardini.com

David Kidman

Scottish Guitar Quartet - Fait Accompli (Circular Records)

This CD, the Quartet's second recording, bears a 2002 date, yet it has only just reached me – some quirk of distribution no doubt... Anyway, suffice to say that it does largely what it says on the proverbial tin, being a spirited 40-minute set of pieces played by four acoustic guitarists, mostly in the jazzy-classical-folk mould that would be regarded as, or at least bordering on, easy-listening if the textures weren't so perennially busy. And as such some listeners are likely to find them too "twiddly" for continued or repeated listening - so this may not be a CD for listening to all in one sitting (except in the context of superior background music for relaxation perhaps). But taken individually, each track has much to commend it, whether in the ever-stylish, highly accomplished playing or the idiomatic compositions (all originals by one or other group member). Influences and styles range from flamboyant flamenco (Dance Of The Gypsy King) to classical Spanish to classy incidental music (From Dawn To Dust) to gentle bossa-nova (Simplicity Itself). I don't normally appreciate over-tricksy playing, but here the virtuosity is altogether unassuming and is channelled creatively - I specially liked the fascinatingly awkward Sideways Mobile, From Dawn To Dust and the softly-characterised After Hours. The quartet comprises Malcolm MacFarlane, Ged Brockie, Kevin Mackenzie and Nigel Clark; of the ten tracks, Ged gets the lion's share as regards composing credits (six), Malcolm three and Kevin just one. The recording quality is predictably excellent, with individual lines perfectly clearly delineated at all times. The potential drawback is that the unvarying timbre of four guitars could prove tedious for the non-aficianado. However, whatever your musical tastes, basically if you enjoy the likes of Martin Taylor, or just love the sound of the guitar well played then you just know the quartet can't put a finger wrong. If you don't, then keep well away – but then, fair dos, you wouldn't give it a second glance if guitars weren't your bag would you?... A fait accompli in both senses – an accomplished feat and a foregone conclusion (if ever there was one!).

www.scottishguitarquartet.com

David Kidman

Enoch Kent - For The Women (Second Avenue)

Scotland-born though now based in Canada, Enoch, an original co-founder (with MacColl & Seeger) of the Singers' Club (aka the Critics Group), and former member of stalwart Scottish folk acts The Reivers and The Exiles, here presents his third solo CD. It delivers sixteen contrasted songs for or about women, either drawn directly from the tradition or else from the pens of women writers (with the exception of one of his own). Subtle and satisfyingly minimal accompaniments frame Enoch's characterful yet distinctively relaxed singing (a voice that

conveys both experience and understanding for his chosen material), the only drawback being that his typical over-accenting of the rolled "R" consonant is a mannerism that can sometimes irritate. You can't for one moment deny, though, this is a fine collection of songs and well sung.

www.enochkent.ca

David Kidman

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