

with a phrase like “put Mike Stinson on the stereo” in the title track. Stinson is widely admired on the LA scene but far less known elsewhere.

On this effort, the Hawks diversify, breaking into Celtic, Tex-Mex, and '70s' soul at the hand of mixer Ethan Allen (Patty Griffin, Daniel Lanois). Other notable tracks include the rock 'n' roll “Yolo County Airport,” gorgeous harmonies in “Open Door,” the Celtic-styled “Salty Sea,” and the appropriate closer, “Good and Foolish Times.” As the chorus says, we've all taken some long and winding rides. Take this one. You won't be disappointed.

—Jim Hynes



PROFESSOR LOUIE & THE CROWMATIX

As The Crow Flies
(Woodstock Records)

As The Crow Flies

is a collection the

most-requested Crowmatix songs, plus two new originals. I looked at the song list, saw many of my favorites, and listened with a smile. There aren't many bands with the real roots music credentials of the Crowmatix (Gary Burke on drums, “Miss Marie” Spinosa on vocals, Frank Campbell on bass and Josh Colow on guitar) vis-à-vis the Band. Leader Professor Louie, a.k.a. Aaron Hurwitz (vocals and keyboards), was given his colorful nickname by none other than Rick Danko during Louie's days performing with his band and alongside him as a duo.

Spinosa's presence is a ray of light on stage. “Jackie,” featuring Miss Marie, is haunting. Burke's dazzling drum showcase, “Mr. Luck,” has a solo that would make Gene Krupa proud. The Crowmatix's arrangement of the Band classic “Life Is A Carnival” rivals the original. The two new songs, “Need For You” and “Daughters & Sons,” will not disappoint. There are no dull moments on this impressive collection.

—Robin Murray



RAILROAD EARTH

Amen Corner
(SCI Fidelity Records)

Railroad Earth

has developed a

reputation as a

rockin', kickin' bluegrass jam band. Their live shows are a testament to that. *Amen Corner* is a departure for the band—but that's a good thing. Perhaps it has to do with the band's recording their latest release in a 300-year-old house in New Jersey, or maybe it's growth. Whatever the reason, *Amen Corner* mixes bluegrass, roots, country and acoustic sides, defying categorization. The energy level and mixture of styles is reminiscent of Bruce Springsteen's *The Seeger Sessions*, and that's saying something!

The music, as always, is crafted beautifully. The lyrics run from seriously intelligent to good-time fun. The banjo, fiddle and mandolin are still at the forefront of the sound that defines Railroad Earth, but a gentleness on *Amen Corner* blends artfully with the energy. The opener, “Been Down This Road,” for example, pairs these mountain instruments with an Arlo Guthrie-like vocal. “Hard Livin'” adds horns to the mix in a bouncy, gritty rocker that would make the Band proud. “Bringing My Baby Back Home” and “Crossing the Gap” exercise the group's bluegrass chops more traditionally, while “The Forecast,” an acoustic gem, breaks through the clouds of the past and floats into the future.

Every cut has something special to offer, including musical images that evoke the Grateful Dead and the Traveling Wilburys (“Right in Tune”). Give *Amen Corner* a listen or three and decide for yourself what dreams and images pass effortlessly through your soul.

—Gene Knapp



KULA SHAKER

Strange Folk
(Cooking Vinyl)

There are some bands that have this aura about them (pre-*Dark Side* Pink

Floyd, King Crimson, etc.) that seems to

make any listener cooler. Kula Shaker is definitely one of those bands. These guys could actually help you get girls—they are simply that cool. Now, after a six-year absence, Kula Shaker has just released its third studio album, *Strange Folk*. Their debut, *K*, had firmly established them in the stratosphere of hip. Maintaining that position was no easy feat, but Kula Shaker pulled it off big time.

There are minor political references throughout *Strange Folk* such as in the hypnotic and funky “Great Dictator (of the Free World),” but basically the album weaves a tapestry of cosmic rock 'n' roll grooves reminiscent of the Doors after a long night of drinking. “Die For Love” and “Strangefolk” blend the power of Vanilla Fudge with the eerie trancelike feel of *Solar Fire*-era Manfred Mann (not the “Mighty Quinn” stuff). “Ol' Jack Tar” drifts gently through your brain and then “6 Ft. Down Blues” rattles you, proving just how addictive Kula Shaker can be.

With three of its original members in tow—Crispian Mills, Alonza Bevan and Paul Winter-Hart (even their names are cool!)—along with the recruited Harry B. Broadbent (original keyboardist Jay Darlington is currently working with Oasis—they are working, right?), Kula Shaker has re-emerged to reclaim their spot in the hierarchy of the rock world's ultra-hipsters. Hopefully they won't be overlooked by rock 'n' roll listeners—that would be a shame.

—Steve Walbridge



REBA McENTIRE

Reba Duets
(MCA Nashville)

For her 31st studio album, Reba McEntire

decided to call on her friends to help. These friends turned out to be the likes of Trisha Yearwood, LeAnn Rimes and Kenny Chesney, among others. *Reba Duets* brings country royalty together on standout songs such as “Faith in Love,” featuring Rascal Flatts, and “Sleeping with the Telephone,” a collaboration with Faith Hill. All tracks have a country feel, even though not all the