

his set with 12 originals along with a few covers (*Crawlin' King Snake*, *Blues Before Sunrise*, Muddy's *How Deep Is the Ocean* and *Please Have Mercy*) and a fresh offering from guitarist Billy Flynn (*Can't Say Something Good About Me*).

In a way, though, "originality" is almost beside the point—whether he's revitalizing a warhorse or contributing something new, Buck's music sounds so deeply rooted in the vintage postwar sound that a listener could be forgiven for thinking these tracks were outtakes from some long-lost 1957 Chess session. Harpists Scott Dirks and "Big Spider" Beck channel Little Walter's spirit like human Ouija boards; pianist Johnny Iguana similarly summons the specters of such past masters as Otis Spann and Sunnyland Slim; the redoubtable Bob Stroger's bass shuffles and boogies deep in the pocket; guitarists Flynn and Thaddeus Krolicki alternate lead and rhythm with vintage Muddy / Jimmy Rogers / Pat Hare / Guitar Junior panache; drummer Jimmi Mayes shows again that he's an overlooked Chicago rhythm master.

Buck's voice has lost some suppleness over the years; his timing, never exactly sure, has gotten stiffer; his lyrics sometimes sound pedestrian. Nonetheless, this company brings out the best he has in him, and aficionados will no doubt appreciate most of what they put forth. Just don't expect any surprises; music such as this once seethed with militance and aggression, but here it's treated with a reverence that might seem more appropriate to a recital hall than a juke.

—David Whiteis

OUR NATIVE DAUGHTERS

Songs of Our Native Daughters

Smithsonian Folkways – SFW CD 40232

When *Living Blues* spoke with Rhiannon Giddens for *LB* #256, she discussed at length the importance of history and how it informs the multi-instrumentalist and singer-songwriter's work. "I feel like my job is not really so much writing. 'Hey, everybody! This is happening and it sucks!' It's more like, 'This is what happened. Can we see how this is still happening? Can we connect to these stories in a way that makes you care about what's going on right now?'" Listeners can trace this sense of



purpose throughout Giddens' career, but it has perhaps never been as fully realized as on her latest project. Giddens invited Amythyst Kiah, Leyla McCalla and Allison Russell to collaborate with her and co-producer Dirk Powell on what would become *Songs of Our Native Daughters*, a powerful collection of songs inspired by the narratives and experiences of enslaved African American women.

Drawing on historical texts and melodies, the Daughters brilliantly connect the stories of black women across time to the present moment. Kiah's strong alto voice on the rocking *Black Myself* recalls the richness and authority of Nina Simone, while her unsparing lyrics reference racism, colorism and slavery: "Is you warshed in the blood of your chattel? / 'Cause the lamb's rotted away / When they stopped shipping workhorses / You bred your own anyway." The blood-curdling a cappella *Mama's Cryin' Long*, written by Giddens, views a lynching through the eyes and words of a child. After learning the name of her family's enslaved ancestor, Russell wrote the haunting *Quasheba, Quasheba* as a way to honor her—"By the grace of your strength / We are home." Through the horrors the Daughters also manifest themes of resistance, survival and hope, exquisitely limned on songs such as *Moon Meets the Sun*, *I Knew I Could Fly*, *Music and Joy* and *You're Not Alone*.

Banjoists and roots musicians all, they bring a variety of musical forms to the table, from a reimagined minstrel banjo tune on Giddens' *Better Git Yer Learnin'* to Haitian folk on McCalla's enchantingly lovely *Lavi Difisil*. The central melody of *Barbados* is considered the oldest western notation of slave music in the New World. Bookending the muted, forboding instrumental are two spoken-word passages read by Giddens—a satirical poem by William Cowper and a modern update by Powell calling out society's complicity in slavery, then and now.

These songs are equal parts beautiful, harrowing and necessary. With its centering of black women's art and voices, *Songs of Our Native Daughters* provides an important American historical and musical correction.

—Melanie Young

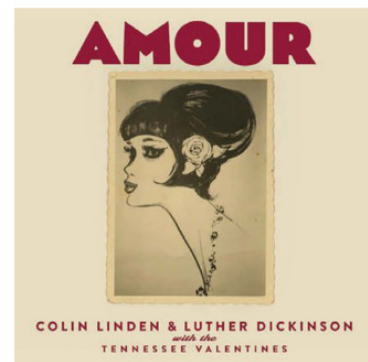
COLIN LINDEN & LUTHER DICKINSON WITH THE TENNESSEE VALENTINES

AMOUR

Stony Plain – SPCD 1405

The program that Colin Linden and Luther Dickinson have put together for *Amour* could easily be subtitled "Love Americana Style," as they draw upon vintage love songs from blues, R&B, country and folk. The project seems largely Linden's undertaking as he partners up with Dickinson for the guitar work but handles the production duties and assembles a backing band and guest artists from the Nashville music scene, where he has taken up residence to oversee the music for the *Nashville* television series. The Tennessee Valentines include bassist Dominic Davis, drummer Bryan Owings, keyboard player Kevin McKendree and violinist and accordion player Fats Kaplin.

Opening with an instrumental version of *Careless Love*, featuring the two guitarists in a spicy dialogue of stinging electric lines, seemingly promises a guitar pyrotechnics affair. That is not the case. What follows is a focus on guest contemporary vocalists (with one exception) delivering heartfelt recastings of classic love songs. Nevertheless, with Linden and Dickinson at the helm, there are plenty of hot guitar licks to spice things up. Linden handles



lead vocals on two R&B numbers, the Jesse Stone-penned, Roy Hamilton hit *Don't Let Go* and the Bo Diddley B-side *Dearest Darling*. He's an emotive singer who is able to infuse just enough grit into these numbers to make them stand up to the originals. And, the twin guitarists engage in grinding, bluesy exchanges that ramp up the funk factor on both tracks.

The lineup of guest vocalists includes Linden's fellow Canadian Rachael Davis for two tracks, Jimmy Reed's *Honest I Do* and a return to *Careless Love*. Ghanaian Ruby Amanfu steps to the mic on Kris Kristofferson's *For the Good Times* and the Chuck Willis R&B hit *What Am I Living For*. Linden recruited two cast members from *Nashville*, Sam Palladio for Ray Price's *Crazy Arms* and Jonathan Jackson for the Elvis Presley B-side *I Forgot to Remember to Forget*. The program is rounded out with a veteran Music City singer-songwriter Billy Swan for a remake of his *Lower Please*, a 1962 hit for Clyde McPhatter. Linden and Dickinson deliver a wide range of stylistic approaches to the vintage material; highlights include the Cajun flavor that spices up Swan's number; a loping shuffle with a ringing electric dialogue on Davis' take on

Reed; and Amanfu clearly evoking Al Green with her softly purring approach to the Kristofferson tune. *Amour* illustrates the creative payoff that results when you give players like Colin Linden and Luther Dickinson the freedom to explore the roots music that provided them with their initial inspiration to become music makers.

—Robert H. Cataliotti

GARY CLARK JR.
This Land

Warner Bros. Records – 584802-2

Gary Clark Jr. is no stranger to racism—the Texas guitarist and singer-songwriter has admittedly and unfortunately dealt with it his entire life. Yet, a recent ugly, racist confrontation with a neighbor who didn't believe Clark was the landowner of his 50-acre ranch near Austin especially infuriated him. Coupled with the turbulent American political atmosphere in the wake of Donald Trump's election, Clark felt like he needed to address what was hap-



pening to and around him in his art. He does this and more on his new release, *This Land*, letting loose lyrically and musically on his most expansive, brilliant set to date.

The title track opens the album like a volcano, with Clark pulling no punches with a hip-hop beat and molten streams of sound from his guitar. Incandescent with righteous fury at those who hate and discriminate against him, he snarls, "Fuck you, I'm America's son / This is where I come from /

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