



Old Californio
Sundrunk Angels
Californio Records

Most of this versatile band's music – with elements of rock, country, folk, and pop – revolves around the guitars of Rich Dembowski and Woody Aplanalp. The punchy rocker "Allon Camerado" displays a level of dynamics that many bands with longer histories just don't get. "Learn to Cheat" shows off all the elements that make this band a fun listen. Essentially it's just a pop tune with wonderful harmony vocals and a killer hook. But bubbling under the whole thing is country guitar playing that shows off superior control when it comes to bends. The solo is out front and a miniature composition unto itself, while the lyric is clever without trying too hard. It's difficult to resist a verse that ends with "I ain't no loser, I just always get beat." A quiet side is revealed on the title cut, with Aplanalp's haunting lap steel floating in and out of Dembowski's arpeggiated electric and some lovely changes.

Besides the guitarists fine interplay, the rhythm section deserves special credit. Drummer Justin Smith and bassist Jason Chesney power many of the songs and really are the difference between this band and many of the jam bands out there that meander aimlessly before completely losing their way. Levi Nuñez also contributes plenty on keyboards and even adds accordion to several cuts.

Old Californio describes themselves as a bunch of old friends who make music, and that kind of camaraderie definitely shows. – JH



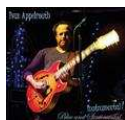
Peter Novelli
Peter Novelli
Self-distributed

John Wayne's advice on acting was "talk low, talk slow, and don't talk too much," adding that it's not about being emotional but about "being able to express emotion." On this debut, Peter Novelli makes a musical adaptation of Wayne's advice, taking his cue from the laconic styles of players like Fenton Robinson or Slim Harpo, a particular favorite of his. Novelli's nods in that direction include sure-handed updates of Harpo's classic "Baby Scratch My Back" and "Ti-Ni-Ne-Ni-Nu" the latter now a zydeco staple for bands in and around Novelli's adopted New Orleans.

Novelli's style also owes something to that of New Orleans' Mac "Dr. John" Rebennack, who guests here on piano but whose formidable guitar chops can be appreciated on his own early albums. Novelli's singing isn't quite so accomplished, but he knows that

and uses a kind of talk-singing that doesn't demand too much of his own abilities or from a listener's patience. It works well with the good naturedly humorous "Lie No Better" (with Little Feat's Paul Barrere on slide) and adds to the atmosphere of the eerie "Grand Isle Dawn," though his limits as a singer may have made for some overly cautious songwriting, in the song's repetitive lyrics and unadventurous melody. A straight instrumental would have given Novelli more operating space.

Yet on the Percy Mayfield-inflected "Since The Hurricane," he does a commendable job, singing about the aftermath of Katrina's devastating sweep; probably because the sentiment is truly heartfelt. Still, his concise but almost rough-hewn guitar playing is where Novelli's real strengths lie. – RA



Ivan Appelrouth
Blue And Instrumental!
EllerSoul Records

Appelrouth is no stranger to folks in the New England area, where he played in various bands for parts of the last three decades before heading back to his home town of Richmond, Virginia. This, his debut recording, is full of the blues sounds he's absorbed during that time.

Some may think it's too *much* of a tribute, with various guitar styles mimicked note-for-note and literally the sound coming along with it. That's certainly the case with several cuts that call T-Bone Walker to mind, including a cover of "Strolling With Bone" and his originals, "T-Boned Again" and the subtle "Strollin' Blues," with its obvious double-stop nod to Mr. Walker. He lists Duke Robillard as a mentor, and he shows the same affinity for Walker that Robillard does.

Also called to mind are B.B. King, Magic Sam, and others literally too numerous to mention. Of the 14 tunes, four are covers. According to Appelrouth, it was all recorded live in the studio in two five-hour sessions. Given the number of musicians (a horn section, Hammond B-3, and rhythm section), it's a tribute to the players that it all turned out so well.

Appelrouth may get criticism for slavishly copying the players that have inspired him, but his playing and the compositions show a musician who has complete control of the blues idiom. – JH



Barry Levensen
The Late Show
Rip Cat Records

This mostly Telecaster playing bluesman sure knows how to work with a singer. Stay out of the way until the

time is right to step up, as he does for Mary Williams in "Whole Lotta Blues." The vocals are an extra thought on this mostly instrumental album, even if its highlight is probably "One For Muddy" – which matches Levensen's Muddy Waters-influenced licks with Johnny Dyer's frighteningly accurate imitation of Muddy's vocals and James Cotton's harp. The tune could be an outtake (well, almost) from one of Muddy's albums produced by Johnny Winter.

Waters is certainly on Levensen's mind when he chokes a slow release from a three- to four-note bend on several cuts and in the high-stepping "Turn Up The A.C.," modeled on Muddy's strutting up-tempo numbers like "Walkin' Thru The Park." But not all of his references are retro. Echoes of contemporaries like Indigenous' Mato Nanji and Big Head Todd Mohr surface in "Steel Life," for instance, and the Tele-played banjo rolls and his instrumental quoting of Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim's "America," Sonny Burke's "Hennesey" theme in "Charlie's Ride" (where he also tosses in an offhand taste of Paul "Hucklebuck" Williams' signature tune) are distinctly non Muddy-like.

Levensen is far from alone in his desire to emulate Waters or B.B. King, as on "Slippin' Down Blues"; he shares that with hundreds, probably thousands of guitarists. It's a factor but by no means the only weapon in a formidable arsenal. – RA

DVDs



Deep Purple
Phoenix Rising
Eagle

Rock fans have been known to form allegiances to just about any band's lineup and, among them, is a sect of Deep Purple fans who are absolutely passionate about their "Mk. IV" lineup of 1975-'76.

To some Purp fans, this was their low point, a period that found them moving away from heavy metal and toward an uncomfortable hybrid of hard rock and funk/soul. To make matters more complicated, Ritchie Blackmore had already quit the band, making way for the largely unknown Tommy Bolin as his replacement.

This is the crux of *Phoenix Rising*, a lavish DVD/CD set that's replete with interviews, color booklets, and 30 minutes of concert footage from a December '75 gig in Japan. The accompanying audio disc contains rare, unreleased live tracks from the Bolin era, which should thrill fans of that lineup.

The action begins with 1974's California Jam concert, the band touring behind their smash *Burn* album and showing Ritchie Blackmore in absolute

peak form. But this was the beginning of the end for Mk. III Deep Purple, with the guitarist leaving a year later after the mediocre *Stormbringer*. Via interviews with bassist Glenn Hughes and keyboardist Jon Lord, the DVD tells how the band brought in various new members, moved its operations to Southern California, and held auditions for a new hotshot guitarist. Clem Clempson of Colosseum and Humble Pie nearly made the cut (also under discussion were long-shots like Jeff Beck and Rory Gallagher), but thanks to his work on Billy Cobham's *Spectrum*, American axeman Tommy Bolin made the cut.

Now, thanks to *Phoenix Rising*, Purp fans can re-evaluate this little-known era in its entirety. Was it the slow-motion trainwreck of a band losing its way, something further compounded by Bolin's drug-induced death at the end of '76, or was it in fact a promising creative period for Deep Purple, one beckoning of things to come? Grab this compelling set and make your own decision. – PP



Elvis Costello
and various artists
Spectacle, Season Two
MVD Visual

In just two seasons, Costello's show – an hour of talk with a single guest or group, with music mixed in – has become one of the real musical treats on television, as exhibited by these seven installments.

Costello usually performs songs from guests and also with guests, displaying some guitar chops not normally associated with his singer/songwriter persona. U2's Bono and the Edge open the season, supplying fascinating stories about working with Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno, as well as great tales about interacting with Paul McCartney and Frank Sinatra. A songwriter's show features John Prine, Lyle Lovett, and Ray LaMontagne. Yes, one of these is not like the others, but it works amazingly well, with Costello bringing great insights and music out of all three.

Costello "builds" a dream band in one episode, with New Orleans pianist Allen Toussaint, the sublime guitarist of Richard Thompson, bassist Nick Lowe, and Band drummer Levon Helm. A brief chat with Thompson highlights expected and unexpected influences on his playing before a blistering solo on "Shoot Out The Lights" highlights what makes him unique in the guitar world. Costello's old-fashioned "guitar pull" brings together Sheryl Crow, Ron Sexsmith, Neko Case, and Jesse Winchester in a show that Winchester steals from all concerned, with a gorgeous "Sham-A-Ling-Dong-Ding," featuring some jazz-tinged gut-string from the soft-spoken Southerner.

The season's highlight is a two-