

Disc one presents unreleased studio work, disc two presents a previously unreleased live recording from Royal Albert Hall in 1970. My favorite disc one tunes includes the earlier take of "Sweet Mama Janisse," the heartfelt "I Pity the Poor Immigrant," and a low-key version of a song that's been covered in high-octane ways, "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl."

Taj sings and plays National Steel-Bodied guitar, along with regular guitar and harmonica. The band on disc two features electric guitarist Jesse Ed Davis (who is also on much of the studio stuff), pianist John Simon, bassist Bill Rich and drummer James Karstein; and, things get rolling after they're introduced, especially on the instrumental "Big Fat."

Blues fans who can take creative detours, this is a collection for you.

'DUETS,' Paul Anka (Legacy Recordings, HHH)

This April 9 CD features 14 songs that pair Paul Anka with collaborators like Dolly Parton, Michael Jackson and others. The release date coincides with the in-store date for his autobiography "My Way: An Autobiography," co-written with David Dalton (St. Martins Press). Despite the photographs, most duet albums are artificially assembled affairs, and this one is mostly that way, with studio tricks galore. In fact, the song that is obviously a new arrangement ("She's a Lady") is inferior to the original.

Other songs fare slightly better: "Crazy" with Willie Nelson, "Do I Love You (Yes In Every Way)" with Dolly Parton and "Pennies from Heaven" with Michael Bubl .

Folks who enjoy easy-listening music will enjoy this one.

'She Paints Words In Red,' House Of Love (Cherry Red Records, HHH 1/2)

This April 9 CD comes from a band that was "one of the most critically acclaimed Indie Rock bands of the late 1980s/early 1990s."

It is a brand-new studio album that consists of longtime leader singer/songwriter/guitarist Guy Chadwick, lead guitarist Terry Bickers, drummer Pete Evans and bassist Matt Jury. Chadwick's singing is low-keyed, almost conversational, but the music varies widely.

There are Beatles-flavored songs, others that sound like early R.E.M., though many songs' subject matter lean toward the morose. There are few vocal harmonies to sweeten the pot.

Highlights include the ethereal title song, the equally dreamy but somewhat creepy "Trouble In Mind," the sorta-depressing "Hemingway," the touching "Sunshine Out of the Rain" and the sludgy "Eye Dream."

This is a good album for those who enjoy dreamy early alternative sounds.

'Dirt Road Driveway,' Granger Smith (Pioneer Music, HHH 1/2)

This April 16 CD is Granger Smith's ninth studio album, and is being released in conjunction with his third annual 100-Mile Boot Walk from Austin to Fort Hood honoring troops and raising awareness about returning soldiers' needs. This column will be published after the Boot Walk's conclusion, but I'm sure Granger and the charity will appreciate the support from Sun Herald readers who visit the Boot Walk website.

I'm not a regular country-radio listener, so my opinion that today's country music is mostly "Southern rock with pedal steel and fiddles" applies here.

A difference is that this album of self/co-written songs (one by David Ramirez) was recorded and self-produced at Smith's home studio with his road band.

"We Do It In a Field" is very catchy; and, there are other highlights, like the fiddle-driven "I Am the Midnight," the banjo-bouncing "Miles and Mud Tires," and the first of the "Earl Dibbles, Jr." songs, "Country Boy Love."

Fans of heartfelt modern country music will enjoy this CD.