



Willie Nelson

The Complete Atlantic Sessions Rhino | Warner

Like a lot of country artists, Willie Nelson has made so many albums we doubt even he can remember them all anymore (though in his case, there could be other reasons for that memory loss). But like a lot of country artists, Willie's daunting catalogue can be whittled down to a handful of indisputably essential releases.

Nelson's short list has to include 1973's *Shotgun Willie* and its 1974 followup *Phases and Stages* — both of which form the backbone of Rhino's superb three-disc box *The Complete Atlantic Sessions*. In fact, those two discs are the only albums Nelson released on the label. But their effect on both his career and country music is incalculable.

The semi-autobiographical *Shotgun Willie*, his first recordings after fleeing the stifling confines of Nashville for the hippified freedom of Austin, is arguably Ground Zero for the outlaw country movement. Dispensing with the hired-gun session cats in favour of his longtime band, Nelson infuses his country with touches of jazz, rock, blues, swing and pretty much anything else he feels like. What results are classic cuts — *Whiskey River*, *A Song for You*, *Stay All Night (Stay a Little Longer)* and others — that introduced him to the masses and became mainstays of his live show to this day. Plus the album has one of the best opening lines in music: "Shotgun Willie sits around in his underwear / Biting on a bullet and pulling out all of his hair."

Pretty hard to top. But *Phases and Stages* gives it a run for the money. This concept disc narrates the death of a marriage from both sides — the first half of the set is voiced by the wife, the second half by the husband. Cut with the Muscle Shoals band, it's naturally a more soulful and melancholy affair, as reflected in numbers like *Walkin'*, *Pretend I Never Happened* and *I Still Can't Believe You're Gone*. But its ambitious approach, along with standouts like *Sister's Coming Home* and *Bloody Mary Morning*, mark it as one of Nelson's more memorable and inspired creations.

Having both these discs remastered would be a fine thing by itself. But here, it's only the start. *The Complete Atlantic Sessions* also includes nearly two dozen bonus studio tracks, most previously unreleased. *Shotgun Willie* is expanded with interesting alternate takes, along with first-rate leftovers like Leon Russell's *My Cricket and Me* and the instrumental *Under the Double Eagle*. *Phases and Stages* comes with alternate takes of nearly the entire album, played by Willie's criminally underrated combo.

To hear them at their best, though, turn to the third disc. It resurrects the rare *Live at the Texas Opry House*, a raucous 1974 concert recording of Nelson and co. in full flight in Austin, barreling through a set that includes *Whiskey River*, *Goodhearted Woman*, *Truck Drivin' Man* and a medley of early compositions like *Crazy* and *Night Life*. Unbelievably, this disc was shelved for decades, and only became available in the mid-'90s as part of a box. Of course, in keeping with this set, it's updated here with four extra live cuts and a hazy 13-minute studio jam called *Willie After Hours*. Put it all together, toss in a 44-page booklet with informative liner notes and detailed recording info, house it all in a faux-wood box with a Willie badge on the front and a magnetic clasp, and you've got a must-have collectible for country newbies and Nelson fanatics alike. Heck, Willie himself might want to score a copy to refresh his memory.

★★★★★



Kelly Joe Phelps *Tunesmith Retrofit* Rounder | Universal

Kelly Joe Phelps has come a long way. Over the course of 10 years and half a dozen albums, the Portland singer-guitarist has evolved from a slide blues master to a folky fingerpicker; from a traditional act to a contemporary performer; from a cover artist to an original composer; and from a solo artist to a bandleader. But he's not done yet. True to its title, his seventh album *Tunesmith Retrofit* marks the latest steps in Phelps' continuing progress both as a player and songwriter. In the first regard, he's added some new instrumentation — aside from his expressive guitar work, Phelps plays melodica and banjo, an instrument he claims not to have touched for 20 years (not that you could tell). In the second, he's started writing instrumentals, including the banjo sprint *Scapegoat* and the guitar rag *Macdougall*, a tribute to New York folk icon Dave Van Ronk. On this dozen-track set, he also balances solo pieces with band cuts featuring the tasteful, understated backing of Zubot and Dawson, among others. Some things that haven't changed: The purity, sincerity and sheer beauty of his sound, best exemplified here by the haunting *Handful of Arrows*, an epitaph for late bluesman Chris Whitley. By broadening his approach without sacrificing his integrity, Phelps has made his richest and most fully realized disc to date. And something tells us he's still got a way to go.

★★★★

HEAVY METAL

Stone Sour *Come What(ever) May* Roadrunner | Universal

We can understand why Slipknot singer Corey Taylor and guitarist Jim Root — the main instigators behind Stone Sour — would want a side project that isn't just a carbon copy of their day job. What we can't understand is why they would want a side project — or at least a second album — that's basically a carbon copy of every crappass metal band from here to eternity. *Come What(ever) May* is 48:54 of rock clichés and poses strung together into comfort food for the least discerning fan. The craggy



The Sleepy Jackson *Personality* (*One Was a Spider,* *One Was a Bird*) Virgin | EMI

Since we last heard from them, Luke Steele's Australian popsters The Sleepy Jackson lost two members who quit to form End of Fashion. Is that who singer-songwriter Steele is really referring to in the emo-length subtitle to his second album *Personality (One Was a Spider, One Was a Bird)*? Perhaps. Or maybe he's talking about God and the Devil, the two sides of his personality, or some combination of all of them. Ultimately, your guess is as good as ours. But one thing is crystal clear: The staggeringly creative Steele remains the sole personality at the heart and helm of the band. And this 13-track set sees him steering The Sleepy Jackson away from the rocky shores of power-pop and into the clear blue oceans of orch-pop. Gene-splicing the outstanding attributes of George Harrison, Brian Wilson, Robyn Hitchcock, Prince, Todd Rundgren, David Bowie, Walt Disney and Phil Spector — then bringing his creation to achingly beautiful life with strings and horns and grand pianos and soaring falsettos and lush choirs and lush arrangements and decidedly spiritual lyrics ("Devils are in my brother's room. How long 'til God knows that?"), Steele lovingly spins swirling symphonies that could serve as Muzak on the escalator to heaven. Sure, sometimes they're so light and airy they threaten to float away on their cotton-candy clouds. But you sure can't accuse them of lacking in personality.

★★★★

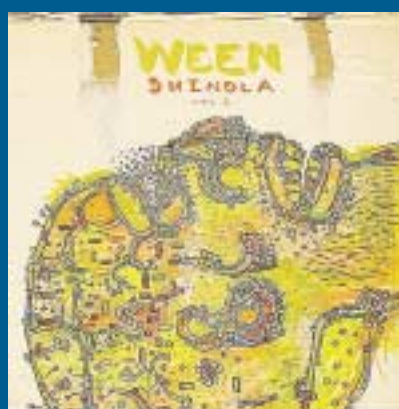
vulcanized guitars, the pulverizing double-bass beats, the chest-beating vocals and agonized dinosaur bellowing, the anthemic choruses and power ballads; it all sounds like a cross between Godsmack and Nickelback on 'roids. Back to the day job, boys.

★★

WIMPY POP

Five for Fighting *Two Lights* Aware | Sony BMG

Hey, here's an idea: How about



Ween *Shinola Vol. 1* Chocodog | MVD

The boys of Ween don't seem to take much seriously — including themselves. Clearly, though, that attitude does not extend to their archives. Over the past few years, musical brothers Dean and Gene Ween have independently released a slew of vintage live fare. Now they've turned their attention to their studio material. *Shinola Vol. 1*, as its title implies, is supposedly the first in a series of compilations featuring rarities, leftovers and assorted unreleased tracks from this demented duo. And if these cuts are anything to go by, we're in for a wild ride. *Shinola's* dozen tunes are as outrageous and freewheeling as you'd expect from Ween — though more fully formed and satisfying than the average odds 'n' sods. *Tastes Good on the Bun* and *Big Fat F—k* fulfil the goofball quotient. *Boys Club* is a hilarious sendup of Michael McDonald's smoky soul-pop. *homielle* is a spot-on Thin Lizzy homage. *Monique the Freak* beats Prince at his own funky game. And the surprisingly sincere slow-rocker *I Fell in Love Today* is a flawless pop gem. Seriously. Can't wait for Vol. 2.

★★★★

we put Five for Fighting's John Ondrasik in a cage with James Blunt, Damien Rice, Daniel Powter — and a gun with three bullets? The one who comes out alive gets to be the officially sanctioned Wimpy-Guy Troubadour of His Generation. The others get the immortality and career boosts that come from untimely death. And we only have to listen to one CD of sensitive singer-songwriter pop and poignant post-9/11 piano ballads like this every couple of years. So really, everybody wins.

★★1/2

HIPPIE MUSIC

G. Love *Lemonade* Brushfire | Universal

Fear not, Special Sauce fans. G. Love hasn't sacked his long-time rhythm section. According to singer-guitarist Garrett Dutton, the shorter name just looks better on a CD. But cosmetic or not, it also reflects his ongoing campaign to expand his horizons.



UPCOMING
RELEASES

August 15

TRACE ADKINS *Dangerous Man*
CHRISTINA AGUILERA *Back to Basics*
PANIC CHANNEL (*oNe*)
KINNIE STARR *Anything*

August 22

CURSIVE *Happy Hollow*
GOV'T MULE *High & Mighty*
PARIS HILTON *Paris*
KELIS *Kelis Was Here*
LAMBCHOP *Damaged*
NOMEANSNO *All Roads Lead to
Ausfahrt*
OUTKAST *Idlewild*
PRIMAL SCREAM *Riot City Blues*
RADIO BIRDMAN *Zeno Beach*
PF SLOAN *Sailover*

Source: jam.canoe.ca/Music
All Dates Subject to Change

FROM THE VAULTS:
AUG. 9, 2002Alejandro
Escovedo*By the Hand
of the Father*

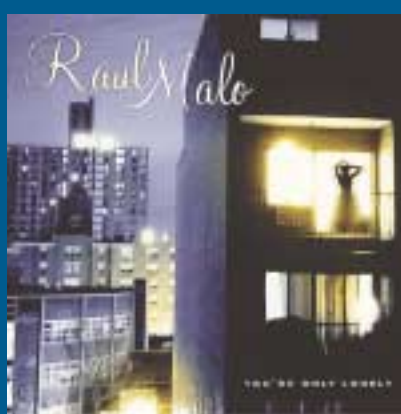
Texas Music Group

Texas singer-songwriter Alejandro Escovedo's music has always had a dramatic, literary cast to it. But his boldly ambitious and deeply personal album *By the Hand of the Father* takes it to a whole new level. The soundtrack and score to a Los Angeles theatrical production penned by Escovedo and other Latino artists, *By the Hand* examines the Mexican-American experience of the 20th century as seen through the eyes of those who left their



homelands, families and heritage behind and crossed over physical and cultural borders in search of the American Dream. Elegantly combining Escovedo's darkly rich roots-rock with spoken-word passages, Mexican melodies, Spanish lyrics and traditional instrumentation, individual vignettes like *Hard Road*, *Wave*, *Rosalie* and *With These Hands* seamlessly dovetail into a sweeping, epic exploration of family, honour, heritage, identity and pride in the face of racism and economic struggle. Without a doubt, this is Escovedo's most personal and moving work by a mile — and coming from him, that's no mean feat.

★★★★



Raul Malo

You're Only Lonely
Sanctuary | EMI

"We used to have good times together," croons Raul Malo. Can't argue with that. When Malo is fronting roots outfit The Mavericks, you can always count on him to get the party started. On his solo outings, however, the singer-guitarist is more unpredictable. Take his third CD *You're Only Lonely*. You won't find any twangy rockers here. Instead, what you get is a sophisticated set of orchestrated cuts apparently aimed at turning Malo into an adult-contemporary balladeer. Aided by pop maestro Peter Asher, Malo applies his Orbisonian pipes to bittersweet romantic odes like JD Souther's title cut, Randy Newman's *Feels Like Home*, The Bee Gees' *Run to Me*, Harry Nilsson's *Remember* and Ron Sexsmith's *Secret Heart*. Admittedly, it's more current and approachable than the plethora of Tin Pan Alley albums clogging the shelves. But with the exception of the lightly spicy Cuban-flavoured original *For You*, it's also too smooth, syrupy and restrained for a man of Malo's energies. Let's hope he drops the torch and gets back to the twang soon.

★★★

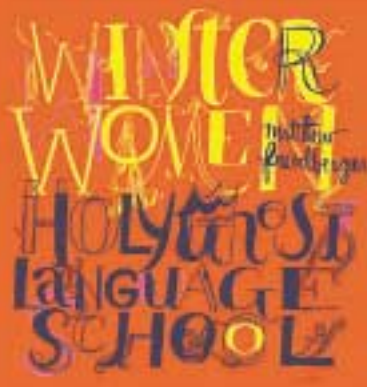
CANCON CLASSICS

Loverboy

*Get Lucky: 25th
Anniversary Edition*
Legacy | Sony BMG

We are very much in favour of refurbishing and reissuing CanRock classics. And while Loverboy's second album *Get Lucky* would not be at the top of our personal wish list, it qualifies as one of the biggest albums of the '80s, thanks to pop anthems like *Working for the Weekend*, *Jump* and *When It's Over*. So it's only right that guitarist Paul Dean has remastered the nine-song affair and tossed in some unreleased tracks and demos from his archives for this *25th Anniversary Edition*. The new liner notes and cardboard O-ring sleeve are nice touches too. But now that we've got this out of the way, could somebody — anybody — please give the same royal treatment to the Streetheart, Teenage Head and Max Webster catalogues?

★★★★1/2

Matthew
Friedberger*Winter Women / Holy
Ghost Language School*
859 | Sonic Unyon

Matthew Friedberger cannot be stopped. In the past two years, he and sister Eleanor — collectively better known as Fiery Furnaces — have issued three adventurous albums and a rarities set that basically counts as a fourth. Yet the songs keep coming. So here he is again with his first solo release: *Winter Women / Holy Ghost Language School*, an eclectic double-disc set (naturally) that showcases the range of the prolific singer-songwriter's expertise. *Winter Women* is a set of strongly melodic and wistful piano pop that is also surprisingly pretty and accessible — especially given Friedberger's penchant for esoteric and hyperliterate lyrical verbosity ("Through combining up his vacuum valves he could rig up a circuit that could generate 16 salves"). Sure, it's peppered with the usual backward tape manipulations, clattery percussion and squishy synth lines — but from a guy like Friedberger, this is practically bubblepop. *Holy Ghost Language School*, not so much. The yang to *Winter Women*'s yin, this surreal 46-minute rock opera about a religious American language instructor in Asia is more in keeping with Friedberger's challenging and uncompromising nature. On these nine tracks, that takes the form of darker melodies, skittery beats, lengthy instrumental sections, numerous spoken-work passages, short-attention-span arrangements and bursts of noise. Yet somehow, the two discs combine into a work that is every bit as intriguing as it is difficult. And one that will hold your interest — at least for the few weeks it takes him to ready his next multi-disc epic.

★★★★

Teenage Head

Teenage Head
Lobotronics | Sonic Unyon

Ask and ye shall receive. No sooner did we finish reviewing Loverboy's expanded reissue of *Get Lucky* — and lamenting that nobody had done the same for Teenage Head and Max Webster — than this bad boy dropped into our lap. For those who weren't around at the time, these Hamilton pop-punks were basically Canada's answer to The



Nina Gordon

Bleeding Heart Graffiti
Warner

Turns out you can fight the seether after all. In fact, on her second solo album, former Veruca Salt frontwoman Nina Gordon pretty much kills that sucker. How? By nearly drowning it in treacle and then boring it to death. Apparently the byproduct of a bad breakup, the Bob Rock-produced *Bleeding Heart Graffiti* is a dismally self-indulgent pity party that finds Gordon turning her back on the gritty guitars and alt-rock aggression of her youth. In their place? Maudlin, Sheryl Crowish ballads dripping with strings, grand pianos and so much lachrymose, woe-is-me wallowing you just want to slap her and tell her to go out, get drunk, let lucky and get over herself already. "Somebody stop me," she whines. We couldn't agree more.

★1/2

Ramones, with a dash of Elvis supplied by mumble-mouthed singer Frankie Venom. And their self-titled first album from 1979 is a bona fide chunk of essential CanCon, boasting a brace of snappy three-chord guitar-crunch noisemakers like *Top Down*, *Picture My Face*, *Lucy Potato* and *You're Tearin' Me Apart*. None of them has sounded better than they do on this recently remastered version. The lack of bonus material is kind of a bummer — surely there are live tapes floating around — but just having this back on CD in wide circulation is bonus enough. Now, about those Max Webster albums ...

★★★★

UNDERGROUND

Kingsway &
Mooncussers

U.F.O.L.P.

Transsiberian | Scratch

You are what you play. You are if you're Kingsway & Mooncussers, anyway. On *U.F.O.L.P.* these two shape-shifting Vancouver bands — fronted by creaky singer-guitarist RC Joseph — merge to quietly unveil a fittingly sweet, subtle, soothing and slowly evolving indie-folk song cycle about aliens, humans, outer space and our own world. Ladies and gentlemen, we are floating in inner space.

★★★

Ani DiFranco

Reprise

Righteous Babe | Outside

Think of it as the calm after the storm. Ani DiFranco's 15th solo studio set *Reprise* was begun in New Orleans last year but finished in Buffalo in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. So perhaps it's understandable that the alt-folk singer-songwriter seems to be in a sombre, more reflective musical mood. Instead of the choppy, percussive acoustic guitar sound that is her signature, DiFranco takes a more nuanced approach on these 13 cuts. Supported by multi-instrumentalist Todd Sickafoose but doing most of the heavy lifting herself, she fashions soothing neo-folk from a shadowy palette of gentle fingerpicking, ringing melodies, jazzy standup basses, twangy noirish guitar licks, atmospheric keyboards, light percussion, dusty textures and real-world sounds from traffic and trains to birds and rain. DiFranco's quieter stance doesn't extend to her lyrics, however. As she has for years, Ani continues to seamlessly make the personal political and vice versa, rhapsodising about love one minute on confessions like *Hypnotize* and *Nicotine*, blasting the usual right-wing targets ("Halliburton, Enron, chief justices for sale") the next on the anxiously crackling *Decree* and *Millennium Theatre*, her latest in a long line of rabble-rousers. "The resistance is just waiting to be organized," she predicts. Guess that could make this the calm before the storm too.

★★★★

Much like its 2004 predecessor *The Hustle*, Dutton's seventh set *Lemonade* finds the Philly native augmenting his jammy blues-hop with layers of keyboards, percolating percussion and even slicing steel guitars. Naturally, his guest list has expanded accordingly, with Los Lobos' David Hidalgo, Ben Harper, label owner Jack Johnson and others dropping in help the dusty-voiced Dutton get his groove on. From the wiseass antics of *Can't Go Back to Jersey* to the swampy blues of *Let the Music Play* and countrified folk of *Rainbow*, *Lemonade* is a light, sweet treat that goes down smooth.

★★★★1/2