

“Nancy’s Minuet,” Shelby Singleton’s “Shed Me No Tears” (featuring Mel Bergman’s pedal steel), and especially the galloping “Johnny, Remember Me” (an English hit for John Leyton in ’61) are uncannily Ventures-like but stand on their own.

Dickerson, Bergman, and Garrett Immel swap lead, rhythm, and bass chores (each typically taking center stage on the songs he wrote), with drummer Chris Sprague, who also penned the set’s opener, “The Lonely Matador,” featuring Edwards. Bergman enters the Ventures’ fuzztone period with “Do The Frank Sidebottom,” featuring a swinging bridge; Dickerson dips his Vibramute bar about as low as it’ll go on the tribal-rhythmed “Honest Engine”; and Immel’s “Shoreline Gold” is a beautiful ballad with an island feel.

If imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery, then the Ventures should feel extremely flattered that such versatile, talented musicians joined forces to pay tribute to them. — **DF**



### J.P. Harris & The Tough Choices

#### I'll Keep Calling

Cow Island Music

This record is — in the all-too-true words of Marty Stuart — too country for country radio. J. P. Harris and his band serve up honky tonk, western swing, and good old country weepers that hearken back to the glory years of the genre. It’s the kind of thing country radio is sorely lacking these days, but Harris doesn’t sound like the kind of artist who is going to quit playing just because of that.

Harris wrote everything here, and his band, led by Chris Hartway on guitar, and Asa Brosius on pedal steel, deliver the goods on all counts.

Hartway shows off his twang and jazz-influenced licks at every turn. Even though his solos are short, the crisp notes and massive bends on the title cut prove he’s learned the lessons of the masters well. Most of his solos highlight multiple string bends, whether it’s a ballad like “Badly Bent” or the Don Rich-inspired playing on “I’m Stayin’ Here.”

“Shake It,” with its rockabilly feel, gives Hartway a perfect chance to display his comfort with chromatic runs and jazz leanings. He doesn’t go to the well for tricks often, but when he does on “Return To Sender,” his banjo rolls and chicken pickin’ are right on the money.

Brosius should also get a tip of the cap for his pedal steel playing. Whether it’s the crying steel on “Badly Bent” or the flying notes on “Cross Your Name,” he shows a high level of understanding of this music.

Let’s not forget the bandleader either. Harris plays fine rhythm guitar, but more importantly he has the perfect voice for this music, conjuring up the masters without being derivative. — **JH**

## Books



### Don Kirshner: Man with the Golden Ear

By Rich Podosky

Hal Leonard

Don Kirshner was a pop-music businessman — and a highly successful one. This new book is a look at his life and exploits, including his impact on the guitar in popular music.

According to the narrative, starting in the late 1950s, Kirshner brought together a group of artists, songwriters, and producers that produced an astounding number of pop hits — more than 200 tunes — many of which became standards in the pop catalog. But music changed, and Kirshner’s original “business model” was no longer operative, so he changed as well.

In the mid ’60s, he moved into television and was the visionary behind production of music for the Monkees and many of their top-ten hits, as well as the Archies, whose “Sugar, Sugar” was a true smash. None of this, of course, would endear Kirshner to true guitar players.

When he found himself without a project in the early 1970s, he created the syndicated weekend TV show “In Concert” that mutated into “Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert.” The show ran throughout the decade, and the book describes how Kirshner was able to secure top-tier acts like the Rolling Stones, Allman Brothers, and Alice Cooper. These are important because, in nearly all cases, the artists were performing live — not simply lip-synching. For a good portion of the music-buying population at the time, this was a rare opportunity to see and hear a favorite band or hit group.

Some have questioned facts presented in the book, and there aren’t a lot of photos, so consign this to the “historians only” category while acknowledging the debt to Kirshner for bringing live rock music on television to the masses. — **ECS**



### History of the American Guitar

By Tony Bacon

Backbeat Books

Re-releasing a book long out of print can be as easy as just ordering a new printing, maybe having a new cover designed. But this title, originally published in 2001, has received a complete makeover with updated material and expanded with more guitar history.

The book begins in New York City in the 1830s with the arrival of Christian Martin from Germany, to set up the Martin company. From that historic moment, the book takes readers on a fascinating and comprehensive visual tour of U.S. guitar history. More than 75 brand names are represented, and along with the

expected names there is also information about Ditson, James Trussart, Maccaferri, Stella, Suhr, and Wilkanowski, among others. The interrelated stories of the guitar, mandolin, and banjo are mixed seamlessly with the history of the diverse American music that grew and prospered with these instruments, from country to blues, jazz to rock.

There are more than 300 color photos illustrating the guitars mentioned in the narrative, the bulk of which were part of the short-lived but unparalleled Chinery collection.

Large format and excellent production quality mean that this is a high-value item — a lot of info and pictures for not a lot of money. On the other hand, with many quality books now becoming available that explore the history of less-well-known companies — see the new history of *Regal Musical Instruments* for example — this sort of survey is probably best suited for enthusiasts rather than historians. — **ECS**

## DVD



### The Grateful Dead

Dawn of the Dead

Sexy Intellectual

Studying the roots of psychedelic rock

is time well spent, since you’ll learn a lot about the way trends and styles develop in pop music. Like any other great band, the Grateful Dead and other acts from psychedelic San Francisco didn’t spring fully formed from the ground in 1967. Subtitled “The Rise of the San Francisco Underground,” this DVD delves into the musical and cultural roots of the movement, from Jerry Garcia’s eclectic musical roots to the influential drug experiments of Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters.

Time is also spent talking about the Dead’s musical communion of Garcia’s jugband and bluegrass roots, bassist Phil Lesh’s avant-garde classical tastes, organist Pigpen’s blues musings, and rhythm guitarist Bob Weir’s folk strummings. Yet it all worked, and the band forged a completely unique sound, just as the world was exploding into a psychedelic rainbow all around them.

You’ll also learn about the early days of Big Brother & The Holding Company, Jefferson Airplane, the Charlatans, and Quicksilver Messenger Service. Indeed, many acid-rock connoisseurs feel that the movement was already dying by the time of 1967’s famed Summer of Love was sold out in a tidal wave of wannabes, media overkill, and crass commercialism.

This DVD tries to capture those magical formative years of 1964-’66, when psychedelia was blossoming below the radar. And for that, *Dawn of the Dead* is highly recommended. — **PP VG**