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Article published July 01, 2010

### Chesnutt salutes musical heroes with covers of 12 country classics

BLADE STAFF AND NEWS SERVICES

#### OUTLAW Mark Chesnutt (Saguaro Road Records)

For more than three-quarters of an hour over 12 tracks, Mark Chesnutt pays homage to the country artists that he considers his heroes. With four platinum and five gold albums, 14 No. 1 singles, and 23 Top 10 singles in a career that spawned 13 successful releases, Chesnutt turns to a package of cover songs for his latest.

His distinctive, rich, resonant baritone and his laid-back delivery make him the perfect singer to rework these great tunes.

"Outlaw" calls out some of the best-known, neo-traditional country classics, much like the sort of songs Chesnutt has been doing for more 20 years. They are mostly barroom anthems, the sort that tell a story of hard-drinking while the listener is doing exactly that.

Chesnutt resurrects the works of Billy Joe Shaver, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, and Waylon Jennings, among others, who were in the forefront of country stars who invented the "outlaw" persona in their songs and bad-boy demeanor.

While Chesnutt stays true to the originals, the songs hold up remarkably well. The titles give you a good idea what to expect. Among album highlights are "Whiskey Bent And Hell Bound," "Need A Little Time Off For Bad Behavior," "Only Daddy That'll Walk The Line," and "Bloody Mary Morning."

- KEN ROSENBAUM

#### BLUES VIGNETTE Gwilym Simcock (Basho Records)

There are parallels to be drawn between up-and-coming British pianist-composer Gwilym Simcock, 28, and one of his biggest influences, Keith Jarrett, though Jarrett remains one of the world's top masters of jazz piano improvisation.

Still, there is reason to get excited about Simcock's potential, for improvisation is the purest form of musical expression and Simcock does a lot of that with finesse on this two-disc set. The first CD is a combination of solo and duet work with cellist Cara Berridge; the second features his new trio of himself, classically trained Russian bassist Yuri Goloubev, and British drummer James Maddren.

The two discs incorporate jazz and classical, featuring anything from a Grieg piano concerto to a Gershwin arrangement to original compositions by Simcock for himself as a soloist and with his trio. It's hard to put Simcock on par with Jarrett's heart, drive, and fearless passion, but Simcock is certainly one to watch, a talented crossover pianist with a fresh musical vision.

Among other things, he was voted "Jazz Musician of the Year" at the 2007

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Parliamentary Jazz Awards and was nominated as best instrumentalist in the 2008 BBC Jazz Awards competition.

- TOM HENRY

#### CAN'T BE TAMED Miley Cyrus (Hollywood)

They grow up so fast nowadays. It seems like only yesterday Cyrus was a wholesome Disney Channel pixie. Oh, wait, that WAS yesterday.

Can you say "makeover"? Glowering on the cover of her new CD in a midriff-baring (and then some) all-black outfit, her hair dyed dark, the 17-year-old singer looks like the Bride of Dracula.

Fortunately, her sound hasn't turned sinister.

The collection lifts off energetically with "Liberty Walk," a popping dance number (Miley raps!); the Abba-esque "Who Owns My Heart," and the electro-vamp of the title track, which she later reprises with Lil Jon.

You want contemporary? Wrap your ears around the Ke\$ha-like android-pop of "Permanent December."

The good is bundled with the bad, including a superfluous cover of Poison's "Every Rose Has Its Thorn" and some swampy ballads on which Cyrus seems to be channeling Stevie Nicks.

With "Can't Be Tamed," Cyrus' image has undergone a radical change, but her music hasn't changed much. The record is slightly more daring but far from untamed.

-DAVID HILTBRAND, PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

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