

**Matthews Southern Comfort**  
**KIND OF NEW/  
KIND OF LIVE**

Esoteric Recordings  
ECLEC 22359

★★★☆☆

**Plainsong**  
**FAT LADY  
SINGING**

Blue Rose Records  
BLU DP0579

★★★★

*Final recordings from two Iain Matthews led bands*

I've been a long-time fan of Iain Matthews going back way over 40 years. From the original Matthews Southern Comfort through Plainsong and his excellent, and somewhat eclectic solo recordings that have filtered out over the years. I was quietly excited and somewhat apprehensive when these 'new' recordings arrived. I've always been a firm believer in the old saying 'that you can't go back to recreate what used to be.' And in many respects that is very much the case with these releases.

Matthews Southern Comfort on this two-disc set is not the same as the band from way back in 1972. In fact, the only original member is Matthews himself. The rest of the musicians are mainly Dutch—Matthews has lived in the Netherlands for a number of years—and he is also joined by Florida-based singer-songwriter Terri Binion who not only sings some of the lead vocals but also penned five of the songs. It is mainly a collection of new songs, though there is a revisit to *Woodstock*; but this new version owes little to the chart-topping rendition. With artfully minimalist production that features melancholy echoes of acoustic slide guitar, finger-plucked strings, brushed snare, a whisper of keyboards and plenty of wide open space for Matthews' remarkable voice to fill. Tinkling piano and softly strung guitar gives *O'Donnel Street* a classic, soft country-rock flavour. Performed with piercing intimacy and beautifully recorded, somehow he always sounds like he's sitting right next to you, singing a ballad just for you. Terri revives Richard Farina's modern folk classic *Blood Red Roses*, with a graceful vocal with the accent on the vivid lyrics and melody.

Recorded in 2005 in the Netherlands, Matthews was unhappy with the recordings



and put the tapes away. He rediscovered them in 2009 and heard them in a different light and decided to work on them with additional vocals and instrumentation. Finally mastered two years ago, he licensed them to Esoteric in late 2012 and we finally get to hear them with a bonus second disc of a live recording in the Netherlands from December 2010. This features several songs from the album plus a great version of Carole King's *To Love* and James Taylor's *Something In the Way She Moves*.

The Plainsong album is also a live album recorded in Holland, this one at Boekend in 2003, and now finally released to mark the band's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and also as a farewell disc following the band's farewell tour in August 2012. Founder members Iain Matthews and Andy Roberts are joined by singer-songwriter Julia Dawson and bass guitarist Mark Griffiths who had been a member of Matthews Southern Comfort. The 19 tracks take us through all eras of the band includes songs penned by Matthews, Roberts and Dawson, including some collaborations plus a few traditional songs given the Plainsong treatment. From beginning to end this record captures your attention with smooth rhythms and sincere vocals ... it's full of gorgeous acoustic melodies and engaging narratives. A fitting end to a short-lived band that seemed as though it would never die. **Alan Cackett**

[www.ianmatthews.com](http://www.ianmatthews.com)

**Jimmy Lee & The Edge Of Chaos Orchestra**  
**THE RUNAWAY**

Self-Released: JL03

★★★☆☆

*Reminiscent folk lacking a much needed oomph*

If you are into a good chorus, I suggest you check out the latest release from Jimmy Lee and his band of musicians. I can imagine the gentle banter, chinking of glasses and smiles all round as everyone in the session gets stuck in. On the opening track, to me, he's hit the nail on the head with a rousing ballad based on his exploits sailing on board *The Granuaile*. It's a lusty sing-a-long reminiscent of The Dubliners at their best and in fact pays homage to the late, great Luke Kelly; the 'banjo man' in the song. The Spinners, The Yetties, The Fureys and yes, The Dubliners all come to mind when listening to this recording and if you don't mind a bit of nostalgia



(and I don't mind at all) it will release that yearning when folk music wasn't a dirty word. Unfortunately not every track is like this and there's a tad too much melancholia for me personally, but the lyrics make interesting reading whilst you're listening to them being sung. Take for instance *No Flowers For Geordie*, which has put a whole new perspective on my performing annually at The Ganges Reunion for many years. If you come from the Hampshire/West Sussex borders, several of the band members will be well-known with some nice contributions from Gary Holder (double bass and tuba) and Jon Wigg's excellent fiddle and banjo, but for me personally I'd have introduced some numbers with a bit of get-up-and-go.

**Pete Fyfe**

[www.edgeofchaosorchestra.co.uk](http://www.edgeofchaosorchestra.co.uk)

**Michael Smith**  
**OLD MAN DANCING**

Bird Avenue Music

★★★★★

*Simply a master class in folk-pop songwriting, recording and production, destined to be listened again and again*

OLD MAN DANCING is Chicago-based Michael Peter Smith's first solo studio recording since ANTHOLOGY ONE (2005) and the first since THERE (2000) to entirely embrace previously unrecorded material. On this nine-song collection, Smith's detail-rich tales engage with fact and fiction. It's essential that I reveal from the get-go that every instrument (6 and 12 string acoustic guitars, electric guitars (c/w fuzzbox), Dobro, bass, drums, percussion) you hear was played by Michael Peter, plus, he's the only lead, secondary and support vocalist. The front of the LP style card liner is graced by Old Man Dancing #3, a painting by octogenarian Chicago-bred and based younger, Smith becomes a lithe youngster as he skips energetically through the sonic wonderland that is his OLD MAN DANCING.

*Accokeek* recalls the late April 2004 murder of computer programmer Bill McGuire by Melanie, his nurse/wife of five years. Having drugged Bill, Melanie shot him twice, but that was simply insufficient. She desired every single pound of flesh! So, his dismembered body found a final resting place in three pieces of Samsonite



## NEW RELEASES

luggage. Having driven to *Accokeek* near Chesapeake Bay, Melanie tossed the cases from a bridge. Mrs McGuire is currently serving a 75-year life sentence. Employing lyrical black comedy relative to Bill's dismembering and disposal, Smith adds numerous adroit asides including: 'Got him demonstrating Samsonite, quite against his will' and 'He wants to get himself together again.' The line 'Well, well, well, could this be Helen and Gene's son' is the fulcrum around which the gloriously melodic and autobiographical *Sure Has Grown* hinges. Having heard this tune, as you stride briskly through your neighbourhood the following day, this is assuredly the tune you'll find yourself unconsciously humming.

*Ghost Of Lash LaRue* recalls the popular western motion picture star of the 1940s and 1950s, while the dark hued *Ballad Of Dorian Gray* brings to life the suffocating nightmare of the doomed libertarian in Oscar Wilde's only published novel, *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*. American *Roger Maris* (d. 1985) was a right-fielder who from 1957 through 1968 played Major League Baseball. During the 1961 season Maris scored sixty-one home runs for the New York Yankees. Maris' record stood for the next thirty-seven years, although as Smith points out, these days, America's national pastime is plagued by 'muscle bound clowns' whose skill is fuelled by 'a needle or a pill.' Listen to the layered use of stringed instruments on *Roger Maris* and simply marvel and delight at the work of a craftsman.

Having exchanged his recording studio 'wall of sound' for the four walls of a prison cell, at a few seconds over seven minutes duration *Ballad Of Phil Spector* is the longest selection. Irony rich, the lyric focuses on Spector's predilection for employing firearms in every one of life's decision making processes. But, as Smith astutely points out: 'They have yet to make a gun that can persuade dead girls to live.' Best remembered for his portrayal of gangsters, almost as penance (in song) for the years he prowled the dark end of the street, employing a spoken delivery, Smith paints the Romanian born actor *Edward G. Robinson* into three real-life scenarios. Therein the actor appears as the most public spirited, helpful, generous benefactor any human being could wish to meet! The mining town of Pittston, PA was home to Smith's paternal grandparents. Established in 1864, the Pittston Stove

Company manufactured coal and wood-burning stoves for homes. A warm and cozy album closing ballad, *Pittston Stove* finds Smith recall his childhood and the central, stabilising role the stove played in family life. **Arthur Wood**

[www.michaelpetersmith.com](http://www.michaelpetersmith.com)

### Rich Mahan BLAME BOBBY BARE

Snortin Horse  
Records 009

★★★★

*Impressive album*

*that ticks all the right boxes for me ...*

A former and founding member of rock-country band Shurman, Rich Mahan's solo debut is a pure delight from beginning to end. He tells us in the short liner-notes that his father used to play Bobby Bare records at full volume and that helped to inform the music you'll hear here. He's not talking about the country-folk Bare records of the 1960s, but the Silverstein and McDill-penned stuff of the 1970s that produced such great hits as *Tequila Sheila* and *The Winner*. He even closes this set with McDill's *Put A Little Lovin' On Me*, a minor success for Bare in 1976, but deserving of a top ten placing. At no time does Mahan ape the Bare style; he doesn't need to. He's a damn fine songwriter himself, and his vocal style is totally his very own, ranging from humorous when the song demands it, occasionally deadpan, and quite soulful at others.

There is also a nice variety of musical genres as you will hear with *Favorite Shirt* being pure southern soul employing r&b styled choruses (courtesy of Bekka Bramlett), swaggering slide guitar, soulful Hammond lines and rhythmic rhythm to die for. *Money In The Bank* moves more into southern rock, again with JD Simo's slide to the fore and Randy Leago's piano pounding away in the background. *Overserved In Alabam* is the kind of song you might expect to hear on a Dr Hook album, the harmonica-driven *The Hills Of South Dakota* takes us down the trail of Confederate Railroad and *Rehab's For Quitters*, with Robby Turner's Dobro blending with PT Gazell's harmonica is pure vintage Bare magic—now that's quite a collection.

Oh, and I forgot to mention the hilarious *Tequila Y Mota*, with Turner on pedal steel blending in with Arlan Oscar on accordion and Steve Herman adding Mariachi



trumpets on this drunken romp. Overall, this is an impressive solo debut from Rich Mahan that, through the childhood memories of Bobby Bare and his own undoubted talents, could very well be his breakthrough. **Alan Cackett**

[www.richmahan.com](http://www.richmahan.com)

### The Applesed Collective BABY TO BEAST

Self-Release

★★★

*Rootsy, eclectic and  
organic 12-track*

*debut from the Applesed five-some*

There's little to doubt here that The Applesed Collective—comprised of Andrew Brown (guitar), Sophie Tulip (bass), Katie Lee (banjo), Brandon Smith (violin, mandolin) and Vince Russo (washboard)—are a talented bunch of musicians, and their raw-sounding debut, *BABY TO BEAST*—a beautifully packaged crowd-funded 12-track release whose first half of profits will be donated to the local non-profit organisation, Selma Café—does a lot to magnify this.

Although most of the tracks seem to be of lengthy quality, a small handful of them were worthy of catching my attention—and holding it, one being *Psychic Times*; its organic grittiness opening the album and introducing the listener to the 5-piece's highly acquired and original sound. Other gems on the track list includes the infectiously-woven *Madly Crazy Darlin'*—with its upbeat rhythm, interesting sounds and yesteryear-folk harmonies—and the rather comedically arranged *Lookee For A Reason*—with delicious acoustic guitar strums and driven rhythm—both making for memorable moments of the album's play, and endlessly crediting them as both musicians and composers.

*Chapter Five* differs refreshingly from the other eleven tracks, taking on a much more musing, guitar-led progression, with a harmonically-heaped backdrop of voices and an occasional, slightly menacing edge, whilst the bouncingly-arranged *Mani*—vocally female-led—is perhaps one of the more ear-pleasingly, well-composed songs, as well as being the shortest, of the set. Certainly, the band's eclectic genre of sounds—blues, folk, bluegrass and swing amongst them—and the abundance of creativity will stand them head and shoulders above their counterparting

