

MUSIC

AN ECLECTIC ASSORTMENT REVIEWED BY MARK KERESMAN

The Yawpers ★★★1/2
American Man

Barrence Whitfield & the Savages

★★★★★
Under the Savage Sky
Bloodshot

Roots rock—or Americana—comes in many forms, some accenting the more “rock” side of the equation, some not. Here are two swell hunks of American sounds, different yet both accessible and immediate, but in varying stages of rawness. The Yawpers are a trio from Boulder, Colorado and are a curious mix of punk attitude, country, and blues. Singer Nate Cook’s vocals evoke those of Steve Earle (also George Thorogood, albeit if the latter had a slightly smoother singing style) and their two guitar (plus driven slide playing) tactic recalls the coarse blues-fueled styles of early Led Zeppelin (minus the *Hammer of the Gods* monolithic chords), The Gun Club and their modern-day acolytes The Black Keys, with some of the boom-chick-a-boom of Johnny Cash’s Tennessee Three. Unlike some of their rowdier/raunchier forebears, these lads have some beguiling melodies to go with their pugnacious rootsiness. A band to watch, certainly. (12 tracks, 37 min.)

Barrence Whitfield & the Savages are a New England combo that is, simply, an



Barrence Whitfield & the Savages.
Photo: Drew Reynolds.

old-school party waiting to happen (one where there is a BAND, not a DJ, making with the shakin’ sounds). Whitfield (born Barry White, though not that guy) is a soul shouter in the mold of Little Richard, Ray Charles, and pre-1970 James Brown with the class and gospel-inspired fervor of cats like Solomon Burke and Otis Clay. The Savages are right there with him, pounding out a fusion of gleefully manic rock ‘n’ roll (think the Sonics, Kingsmen, Paul Revere & the Raiders, The Clash circa *London Calling*) with mid-’60s rhythm &

blues/soul (think James Brown, the Atlantic/Stax sound). OY, does it ever ROCK—get a six-pack (of anything) and bay at the moon. (12 tracks, 36 min.) bloodshotrecords.com

Roger Reynolds ★★★1/2
Complete Cello Works
Mode

American composer Roger Reynolds (b. 1934) has composed works interfacing notated composition with electronic media and theater. Reynolds personally knew and learned from such iconic composers as Edgard Varèse (a major influence on Frank Zappa), Nadia Boulanger, John Cage, and Harry Partch. *Complete Cello Works* is just that—works for solo cello and cello with a chamber orchestra and computer generated sounds. The cello is played by Alexis Deschames and he is brilliant, drawing resounding, warm tones and cathartic bangs, slashes, and squeals from his instrument. Like Partch and Cage, he’s of the American Maverick School—like them, Reynolds can be drolly insolent. Unlike some modern composers, Reynolds has a handle on rhythmic dynamics, never dry or ponderous. The 22-minute “Process and Passion” some of the warmth of Brahms and Copeland. Mellow listening it’s not, but it’s not especially hostile either. For those with a taste for post-1970 classical (and that includes Zappa’s classical works) and a love for edgy usage of the cello, this two-CD set will confound, amaze, and enchant you. (10 tracks, 109 min.) modernrecords.com

Pat Metheny/Gary Burton/Michael Gibbs/Eberhard Weber ★★★1/2
Hommage À Eberhard Weber
ECM

For fans of proto-fusion and the ECM sound, the holidays came a little early this year. *Hommage* is a tribute to German bassist Eberhard Weber, whose signature sound is like no other, a sound that combines the greatest aspects of both acoustic and electric basses. Because of a stroke, Weber can’t play these days, but his American and European friends and fans have assembled this tribute to him. It’s all Weber tunes except for the title piece, composed for this occasion by guitar icon Pat Metheny. Recorded live, the assemblage of talent is killer: Metheny; vibist Gary Burton; reed players Jan Gar-

barek and Paul McCandless; bassist Scott Colley; former Metheny drummer Danny Gottlieb; and the SWR Big Band with arrangements by Michael Gibbs (among others). Metheny based the title piece on Weber’s solo improvisation and features dense but never over-busy orchestral arrangements (masterfully done, evoking Gil Evans) in which samples of Weber and big band orchestrations meld into a majestic panorama. The playing is uniformly inspired, mixing the sophistication of orchestral jazz with the nearly-anything-goes spirit of fusion. Weber’s compositions are as moody and eerily cerebral as Bernard Herrmann (who wrote music for many a Hitchcock movie) and otherworldly as late 1960s King Crimson and Pink Floyd (in terms of dreamy, shimmering-as-a-mirage, wraithlike textures and tones). Prog-rock heads, fusionistas, and fans of progressive big band jazz (think Evans, Carla Bley) and classical crossover, this is for you. (6 tracks, 70 min.) ecmrecords.com

Glenn Mercer ★★★★★1/2
Incidental Hum
Bar None

Say “Jersey Boys” and you’ll think of The Four Seasons, right? As well you should, but there are those other Jersey boys that set some of the world afire, namely, The Feelies, formed in Haledon, New Jersey in 1976 and still around. With their distinctive synthesis of The Velvet Underground and The Beatles, The Feelies didn’t sell lots of platters but they garnered many fans in the NY/NJ area and beyond—R.E.M. points to them as an influence and their songs have been featured in Jonathan Demme’s movies. Glenn Mercer is one of the two string-benders of The Feelies, and he plays every instrument on his second, all-instrumental solo disc. Mercer’s style is distinctive—a melding of the tense sustained wail of Robert Fripp and the wired anguish of Lou Reed’s oft-underrated guitar-ing, with some of the guitar “harmonies” and flair of The Ventures. Songs? Some dandy ones, like “Yuma,” a distillation of soundtracks for Westerns, Mexican/Spanish overtones included; the Beatles-ish “Cheyanne,” with its slight psychedelic flourishes; and the shimmering “Laramie,” where Western twang meets soothing synthesized rhythms. It’s like Mercer decided to merge the intensity and sophistication of progressive rock (King Crimson, Brian Eno) with lean, super-

catchy instrumental rock (Ventures), “Hermosa” even evokes “Ghost Riders in the Sky,” and there’s a version of “Over the Rainbow” that’ll melt the hardest heart. (15 tracks, 50 min.) bar-none.com

Ewan MacColl ★★★★★
The Joy of Living: A Tribute to Ewan MacColl
Compass

Ewan MacColl (1915 – 1989) was a Scottish singer, songwriter, playwright, and political activist, very influential in the folk scenes in both the UK and here. His



Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger in 1962.
Photo: Brian Shuel/Redferns

songs have been covered by artists as (seemingly) disparate as Johnny Cash, The Clancy Brothers, The Pogues, Elvis Presley, and Roberta Flack. (Flack’s first hit “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face”—his.) *Joy of Living* is a two-CD set of MacColl’s songs, from the mournful “Cannily, Cannily” (performed here by The Unthanks) to the boisterously melancholy “Dirty Old Town” (by Steve Earle) to the folk-rock-ish “Freeborn Man” (Paul Brady). Many of MacColl’s songs, like those of Woody Guthrie, refer to and/or exude unrest, tenacity (love, labor, and political struggle), and looking the wrongs of the world square in the face. The performers here include the obvious (folk icons Martin Carthy, Norma Waterson, and Dick Gaughan) to contemporary singer/songwriters (siblings Rufus & Martha Wainwright) to indie rock (David Gray, Jarvis Cocker from Pulp, Billy Bragg). Seeking cheerful foot-tapping songs? Not here—but there’s honest angst, reflectiveness, and poignancy aplenty, conveyed for the most part in spare acoustic contexts. Fans of both classic and contemporary folk strains owe it to themselves to know the music of MacColl. (21 tracks, 82 min.) compassrecords.com ■