

Toby Walker *Hand Picked* [Band in the Hand 2008 (2008)] The winner of the Blues Foundation's International Blues Challenge in 2002, Toby Walker continues to redefine Piedmont-style acoustic blues and ragtime with his seventh release, *Hand Picked*. His steadily rolling acoustic-guitar finger-picking, National steel guitar sliding, and baritone singing are accompanied by Jay Ungar (fiddle), Molly Mason (upright bass), Tom Griffith (electric bass), and Martha Trachtenberg (harmony vocals). Walker pays homage to his roots with soulful covers of Nehemiah "Skip" James' "Hard Time Killing Floor" and "Special Rider Blues" and Hank Williams' "Hey Good Lookin'" and "Mind Your Own Business." He also rewrites a pair of traditional tunes ("Your Buggy Don't Ride Like Mine" and "Bootlegger's Blues") and extends the tradition with five original songs and a Dave Van Ronk-ish instrumental, "Generosity Rag." (CH)

Guy Clark *Somedays the Song Writes You* [Dualtone 80302-01471-26 (2009)] With the same attention to detail that infuses his guitar-building, Texas-born Guy Clark has crafted some of the Lone Star State's most memorable tunes. Johnny Cash, Vince Gill, Ricky Skaggs, Jerry Jeff Walker, Alan Jackson, Rodney Crowell, Emmylou Harris, and Bobby Bare are only a few who have covered his songs. Forced to take two months off the road to recuperate from a broken leg, the husky-voiced balladeer has resurfaced with further demonstration of his songwriting mastery. Accompanying his half-speaking, half-singing baritone with the gentle strums of his acoustic guitar accented by the light backing of Shawn Camp (fiddle, mandolin),



Guy Clark - forced to camp

Bryn Davies (bass, cello), Verlon Thompson (lead guitar), and Kenny Malone (drums), Clark serves up 10 new songs cowritten with such writers as Rodney Crowell, Patrick Davis, Jedd Hughes, Ashley Monroe, and Shawn Camp. As he has on each album since singer/songwriter Townes Van Zandt passed in 1997, Clark covers a Van Zandt tune, bringing new life to the gentle love ballad, "If I Needed Someone." (CH)



William Jackson & Gráinne Hambly - fresh as mountain airs

Gráinne Hambly & William Jackson [Mill MRCD 020 (2009)] William Jackson is from Scotland. He's worked with the group Ossian, recorded several well-received solo albums, and scored films. Gráinne Hambly is from Ireland. She, too, has several highly regarded solo albums to her credit and has played on the "Irish Christmas in America" tour with the band Téada, among other projects. With all that, though, this album is the first time these two harp players have recorded together, and you really don't need to know any of that background to enjoy the music here. That's one of the nice things about it, actually. There's more than enough going on to hold your interest if you're familiar with harps or with Celtic music, and it's melodic, clear, and intriguing enough to enjoy even if you don't know anything about any of that. The dozen tracks comprise reels, jigs, and airs in a lively program of mainly traditional music that sounds as fresh as though it were composed yesterday. Each musician plays the harp, and it's a good conversation they keep going. Jackson adds

whistle, bouzouki, and laud [think lute], and Hambly also contributes concertina. It's good to just let the program play through, but especially worth noting are the "Mull of the Mountains/Drummond Castle" set and the "Cam Ye By Atholl?/Eliza Ross's/A'Chubhag ('The Cuckoo?)" set. (KD)

Christer Lundh *Di Gamlaste Bidana* [Nordic Tradition NTCD13 (2009)] This is a collection of 15

songs collected and performed by Swedish folksinger Christer Lundh. He has a strong and direct vocal style and is an excellent guitarist. The album title translates to "the oldest tunes"; in this case that means songs from the 1600s to the 1800s. Many of the tracks have a 16th-century arrangement with rebec, crumhorn, medieval bagpipes, harpsichord, fiddle, and recorder (guest musicians include Maria Larsson, Anna Rynefors, and Erik Ask-Upmark), but the backing never overshadows Lundh's guitar and vocals. Anders Larsson also sings on six of the tracks. Some liner notes are in English, and English lyrics appear on the Nordic Tradition web page. This recording should be of interest to anyone who loves traditional Swedish folk song. (JL)

The Jayhawks *Music From the North Country: The Jayhawks Anthology* [American/Legacy 88697-47032 (2009), 2-CD+DVD] Hot on the heels of the news that the classic Jayhawks lineup has re-formed comes this two-CD and one DVD anthology that collects the best tracks from the band's recorded history. The first disc (also available as a single release) assembles 20 classic tracks: The first 10 feature the songwriting duo of Mark Olson and Gary Louris, and the second 10 with Louris after Olson left the band. It's alt-country in the beginning, but quickly transforms into wonderfully lush, radio friendly, catchy pop songs. It makes a powerful case that the Jayhawks was a wildly underappreciated group in its time. If harmonies and melody are your thing, it doesn't get much better than this. The 20-track disc of rarities (14 previously unre-

leased) contains the usual collection of B-sides, radio sessions, and demos that you don't have to be a diehard fan to appreciate, with the DVD showing the silliness that 90s pop bands were forced to endure to get their music on CMT, MTV, and VH1. If you're not a Jayhawks fan and wonder what the fuss is all about, disc one is sure to convert you. Recommended. (JL)



John Wesley Harding - returns minus a buck

John Wesley Harding *Who was Changed and Who was Dead* [self-released/Popover/Rebel Group 0125 (2009)] With an artist as multifaceted as John Wesley Harding, you're never quite sure what you'll get when he releases an album. In this case he returns to his roots as a pop songwriter, with the band Minus Five (with Scott McCaughey and Peter Buck) backing him. But with Harding, nothing is ever so simple and clear. In this case the lush pop melodies, string quartets, brass horn sections, and multi-layered backing vocals are applied to songs like "Congratulations (On Your Hallucinations)," "Oh! Pandora," and "A Very Sorry Saint." Nothing sums up Harding's slightly skewered look on life better than his fanciful look at his career on "Top of the Bottom," which details his dealings with the music industry. This is an album that works on many different levels. As in most works by Harding, it's literate, twisted, and so much fun. (JL)

Blame Sally *Night of 1000 Stars* [self-released (2009)] On its fourth album, *Night of 1000 Stars*, Bay Area quartet Blame