

Pete Townshend ★★★★★

Truancy: The Very Best of Pete Townshend
UME

While The Who celebrates its 50th anniversary with an international tour in 2015, lead guitarist and principal songwriter Pete Townshend has launched a



reissue campaign of his solo work. *Truancy*, a compilation of his work outside The Who, serves as a solid introduction for casual fans, and also includes two new songs for diehard followers.

Working on his own gave Townshend the opportunity to stretch out artistically, from the laid-back folk of "Sheraton Gibson" to the catchy pop of "Let My Love Open the Door," a Top 10 single from 1980. "A Heart to Hang Onto" a 1977 duet with Ronnie Lane from their Rough Mix album, is one of Townshend's finest romantic ballads. "You Came Back," an underrated gem from the 1983 album *Scoop*, is a charming song about reincarnation.

Townshend the rocker also is on display here. The ferocious "English Boy" and the musically adventurous "Rough Boys" would not have sounded out of place on a Who album. Of the newer songs, "Guantanamo" is a bluesy lament for the Cuban prison, while "How Can I Help You" shows Townshend's gift for a memorable melody.

As a single CD, *Truancy* has its limits. Fine songs such as "A Little is Enough" and "A Friend is a Friend" failed to make the final cut. There is also no sampling of Townshend's live solo work, such as his flamenco-inspired, acoustic version of "Drowned" from *The Secret Policeman's Ball* album. Still, it's good to hear Townshend taking a renewed interest in his solo catalog with the promise of more releases to come. 17 songs, 75 minutes

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Sam Outlaw ★★★1/2

Angeleno
Six Shooter Records

With *Angeleno*, Sam Outlaw carries on the tradition of country music in California, incorporating elements of both the Bakersfield sound and the Los Angeles singer/songwriter scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The romantically plaintive "Who Do You Think You Are?" opens the album with pleasing mix of strings and mariachi horns that reflect the Golden State's musical diversity and complement Outlaw's pensive vocals. The pedal steel guitar of Jeremy Long and fiddle of Gabe Witcher



enhance the romantic yearning of "Keep it Interesting."

Vocally, Outlaw recalls Merle Haggard on "I'm Not Jealous" and evokes the spirit of Dwight Yoakam on the Tex-Mex flavored title track. Outlaw lightens the mood on "Jesus Take the Wheel (and Drive Me to the Bar)," and calls to mind the vocal stylings of Gram Parsons.

Co-producer Ry Cooder, who contributes guitar, banjo and bajo sexto on the album, provides a sympathetic backing for Outlaw's original songs while allowing the artist's personality to come through. From the intimate "Old Fashioned" to the breezy pop of "Hole Down in My Heart," which marries an upbeat melody to sobering lyrics, Outlaw is poised to break out as a country star. 12 songs, 42 minutes

Tiffany Huggins Grant ★★★

Jonquil Child
MGW Records

Tiffany Huggins Grant has battled alcoholism and depression and these strug-

gles have informed her songs on *Jonquil Child*, the Nashville-based artist's second solo album and the first to receive national distribution.

The country-tinged "Some Days a Dollar" is a contemplation of the ups and down life has to offer, while the country-rock offering "You're Not Alone" serves as a recognition that others can help us to weather life's storms.

Grant, who had a hand in writing ten of the album's songs, is a confident singer who is able to work in multiple genres. "Ain't Nobody Leaves This Place" reveals her bluesy side, while "One Too Many" mines the honky-tonk tradition of drinking songs. "One too many is not enough to chase you from my mind," she ruefully sings. The native Georgian draws on her Southern roots for inspiration. The amorous "Trouble on My Mind" features a Steve Cropper-styled guitar, reminiscent of his time with Stax Records, while "If You Only Knew," has overtones of the ballads of Irma Thomas and Percy Sledge. 12 songs, 42 minutes

Bryan Hayes ★★★

Farther Down The Line
Self-released

On *Farther Down The Line*, Bryan Hayes isn't reluctant to pay tribute to his influences but it still able, for the most part, to put an individual stamp on his music, a blend of country and rock.

"Let's Ride" echoes Bruce Springsteen's classic car songs, utilizing the open road as a symbol of freedom and tempo-



rary release from the burdens of everyday life. Hayes name-checks Guy Clark and John Prine, two of his songwriting inspirations, in the lyrics. "Small Town Amazing Grace" is an idyllic presentation of life away from the big city that recalls John Mellencamp's "Small Town" with Hayes adding a spiritual element to his song. With "Our Love is like a Tractor Tire," he

describes the joys and trials of surviving relationships with plenty of automotive metaphors. "Our love is like a tractor tire going round and round through the mud and mire," Hayes sings. "Tangle Me Up in You" draws its inspiration from Bob Dylan's "Tangled Up in Blue" and is an unabashed declaration of love. An Army veteran who served in Iraq, Hayes uses that time in the service for "The Other Side," a song about the loss of a friend and the afterlife, and the gospel-influenced "Southern River." Hayes gets strong support throughout from the Retrievers, his backing band, and marks himself as a songwriter not afraid to speak his mind. 12 songs, 44 minutes

Neil Young ★★★

The Monsanto Years
Reprise Records

"It's a new day for the planet. It's a bad day to do nothing," Neil Young declares on "A New Day for Love," the opening track of *The Monsanto Years*. It's a call to action on a concept album that finds him targeting the agrochemical and agricultural biotechnology corporation Monsanto, genetically modified food and corporate greed.

Young's interest in the topic goes back to the mid-1980s when he was an early organizer and continuing supporter of Farm Aid. In retrospect, "Who's Gonna Stand Up and Save the Earth?" which Young released last year, serves as a preview of the songs of his new album.

Backed by Promise of the Real, which includes Lukas and Micah Nelson, sons of Willie Nelson, Young goes for an amplified, guitar-driven sound that recalls his work with Crazy Horse. "Big Box," with its denunciation of corporate sprawl at the expense of small-town business, and the title track stretch out for more than seven and eight minutes, respectively, and could have used a little tightening.

Young injects a little levity into "A Rock Star Bucks a Coffee Shop," his jab at Starbucks, with a jaunty melody and background whistling. "People Want to Hear about Love" examines the subject matter of songs and what people want to hear versus what they need to know. "Wolf Moon" is the album's sole acoustic track and would have fit it on his landmark album *Harvest*. In the end, Young is following the courage of his convictions and the path of artists like Woody Guthrie and singing about what he feels needs to be changed. 9 songs, 51 minutes ■