

LAURA EVANS

STATE OF MIND

Rosie Music



With her hooky single I'm Alright catching the attention of a swathe of Country-Blues aficionados, Welsh songstress Laura Evans has been turning heads and ears to her engaging presence for some time. Her recent guest slot on the Robert Jon & The Wreck U.K. tour garnered much praise with her setlist giving a sweet taste of what was to come on this record and State Of Mind doesn't disappoint. Interestingly, her kooky, elfin looks translate to her voice in a not too dissimilar way as Stevie Nicks' does. It's the entrancing combination of emotional songcraft and strong performances on this standout debut album that's headed up by her first single I'm Alright, the inspiration for which fell out of the sky on a plane journey, that reels in the receptive listener. This track's message of strength and self-empowerment is a core theme that runs right through the grooves as both Solo and Fire With Fire expose a harder bluesy edge to Laura's emotional landscape. She's accompanied throughout by record producer Josiah J Manning (Kris Barras Band) who plays all instruments in a consummate performance of musicianship. In fact, the interplay between these two opposite musical forces beautifully offsets each other's contributions. For example, the simple but perfectly judged

"pure quality shines through"

musical subtleties found on the balladlike Fool, with Manning's tremolo guitar and Evans' raw vocal, plus Let You Down Easy's rosy country ditty, that some might think crosses over into Sheryl Crow territory, ensures that pure quality shines through even in the quietest moments. In contrast, and as before, this alluring pair take the finely embroidered denim jacket of these country hued songs by the scruff of the neck as they rip and tear through the stomping, swampy blues rock of Drag Me Back In and the hell for leather powerhouse drive on this recording's title track. Along with more musical gems to be unearthed, this debut solo statement is a promising starter from an artist for whom it's worth keeping a close eye and ear out for.

PAUL DAVIES

with emotional lyrics. Sing On, captures the theme of the release, joyous and entertaining full of groove and harmonies. Doubters Prayer has a soulful melody. Liturgy has Gospel tones, choir excellent harmonies here a real highlight. Make No Mistake keeps a steady rhythm on this bluesy number, driving keyboard tones accentuate the tune. Voice For The Voiceless has a laid-back feel, well delivered vocals and heavy bass line. An uplifting, highly recommended timeless release.

COLIN CAMPBELL

STEVE DAWSON & THE TELESCOPE 3

PHANTOM THRESHOLD

BLACK HEN MUSIC

Having your own studio during a pandemic has been a productive period for a prolific artist like Steve Dawson as he recorded three albums worth of material. The first record release from this period was his recent roots release Gone, Long Gone which mixed songs and instrumentals touching on folk and blues influences. This second album is entirely instrumental, and it creatively explores a deep terrain

of soundscapes. Spectral sonics abound as Cozy Corner opens this relaxed musical ride with pedal steel spookily overlaying an alt-country journey evoking desert plains as it ventures further as do most of the songs on this beguiling release. The pedal steel solo on Burnt End is all grace and guile and it leads once again on Twig Bucket with nifty guitar picking in support. Ethereal tones evoking the soundtrack of a beautifully shot country film yet to be made are at the core of this album. As a musician/producer Dawson has complete freedom to roam around his musical mind and experiment with sounds and this phantomatic collection of eleven tracks is the mesmeric result. The funky feel to Ol' Brushy has the unmistakable flavours of The Meters, and a woozy cover of The Beach Boys You Still Believe In Me fits tightly within the overall atmospheric recorded delights. The aforementioned Twig Bucket and Burnt End along with That's How It Goes In The Relax Lounge is the compositional consequences of Dawson's experiences in Memphis during the mixing of this album at the legendary Sam Phillips Recording Studio. As the final track Whirlwind spins out it's hard not to resist playing this enigmatic recording repeatedly.

PAUL DAVIES

PETER BARON

ANOTHER LIFE

HEROIC RECORDS

Solo debut from Baron who has played drums with artists as diverse as Marty Wilde, Charles Aznavour, Spike Milligan, Geno Washington, Leo Sayer, Dave Edmunds, Joe Brown, Lulu, Three Degrees and many more. He also toured for many years alongside Albert Lee in Hogan's Heroes until 2016 when the band called it a day and Baron started working on this project with the help of guitarist and producer Kevin Healy. Opening track In Another Life is a pleasant well written pop/rock song featuring Baron's light vocals and is enhanced by good piano work and a trombone solo. A cover

of Rodney Crowell's song Earthbound has a jangly, country feel featuring Albert Lee's superb guitar picking. Baby Come Home features yearning vocals from Baron and delicious backing harmonies. You Get What You Pay For is a soulful big production number and a beautiful cover of Brian Wilson's ballad Heaven is a standout track. Halfway Down is a sturdy rocker featuring punchy horns and an excellent twangy guitar solo from Lee. This is top class AOR chock full of good songs and great musicians. Merry Go Round features a string quartet and Gryphon's Andy Findon on flute as it describes life's ups and downs. Little Things is a chunky rockabilly romp, but the pace drops for the heartfelt ballad Homefire featuring wonderful dobro from Jerry Douglas. That great songwriter Jimmy Webb's opus Friends To

Burn is another big production job with orchestra and heavenly choir but suddenly breaks into... a rap from Baron's son James! The album closes with the spiritually uplifting Take Me Where The River Flows featuring a soaring guitar solo from Kevin Healy. Great stuff here for lovers of thoughtful AOR material.

DAVE DRURY

GINA SICILIA

UNCHANGE

VIZZTONE

Gritty soul and blues singer Gina Sicilia is originally from Newtown, Pennsylvania but now calls Nashville home, has never been one to sit back Musically. Unchange, the 10th album sees Sicilia return to the Vizztone record label

where she



DENNIS JOHNSON

REVELATION

Independent

On his fourth release Dennis Johnson slide guitar supremo pays tribute to his influencers such as Freddy King, Robert Johnson, and Big Joe Williams. An eclectic nine track compilation, Chris Bell engineered this, with Kevin Shirley mixing final track Don't Owe You A Thing, a particular highlight with a hill country vibe. With a rhythm section of Anton Fig on drums and Jonathan Stoyanoff on bass, this is one class band. They are joined by Bob Frizema on piano and Hammond B3 organ, keeping the groove going. Going Down starts proceedings with a laid-back bluesy vibe, the band sets in quickly to the groove, each instrument perfectly balanced. Talk To You, is all about the guitar work throughout this stomping full throttle tune, Dennis' vocals gutsy also, but what he can do with that guitar is jaw dropping. Revelation is an intricately played instrumental, again guitar highlighting the tune, but

"This is a masterclass of musicianship throughout"

backing is tremendous. Salvation Bound takes us into a spiritual vibe, the organ resounding when the chorus arrives, upbeat tune. 32-20 Blues is a romp, some rockabilly blues delivered with style. Please Don't Go takes us to the Delta with a new interpretation of a standard blues tune, mesmerizing tones. Lonesome Valley, the much-covered hymn sounds fresh and vibrant and full of blues rooted emotion. Ramblin' mixes, bluegrass style picking with a rocky vibe, sweet. Two Lights is well arranged and has a ragtime feel, great vocal harmonies. This is a masterclass of musicianship throughout.

COLIN CAMPBELL