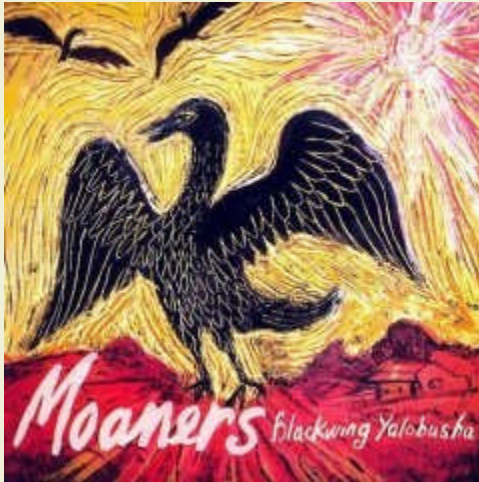


MUSIC

LEND ME YOUR EARS

By Al Kaufman



Moaners
BLACKWING YALOBUSHA
Yep Roc

Former Trailer Bride Melissa Swingle and her drummer, Laura King, offer up another great blend of southern rock with enough gothic darkness and swampy guitars to leave any listener feeling pleasantly moist. The CD gets its name from Blackwing studio (formerly the illustrious Money Shot studios, home to Fat Possum records) in Yalobusha County, Mississippi, and the Mississippi mud and muscadine are felt in every track. The disc opens with "Yankee on My Shoulder," the duo's most straight ahead rocker to date. Yet Swingle's hypnotic drawl, as it bobs and weaves over every chord change, still takes center stage over her guitar's power chords and King's driving beats. The rest of the disc is full of caramel rich songs that cover everything from an homage to a female Black icon ("Foxy Brown") to an old-fashioned love song ("I Think I Love You"), which has nothing in common with the Partridge Family hit except for the name. BLACKWING YALOBUSHA rocks harder than the duo's debut, DARK SNACK, but still remains true to its somewhat creepy, Southern roots and blues influences that still linger in their recording studio. This is sexy, shimmering music, with just a hint of danger, which really just makes it all the sexier.

- [The Moaners website](#) and [MySpace Page](#)
 - [CD \\$14.98 @ Amazon](#)
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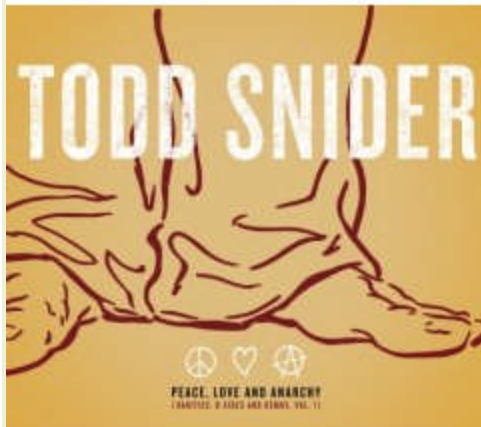
Roger Clyne & the Peacemakers

NO MORE BEAUTIFUL WORLD

EmmaJava

From his days with the Refreshments to the present, Roger Clyne has always easily walked the line between the naughty boy who likes to run down from Arizona to Mexico for some tequila, señoritas and general lawlessness to a man who honestly strives to make the world a better place. While in his younger days he was clearly more of the former, the older, more mature Clyne definitely now focuses on the latter. Musically, his songs do not rip through the Arizona dust the way they did in the past, but he still tries. Many of the songs on NO MORE BEAUTIFUL WORLD demand to be played in front of a typically rabid Clyne audience. "Wake Up Call," told from the point of view of soldiers in Iraq, includes the audience sing-along section "F-U-B-A-R." (For those not in the know, it stands for "fucked up beyond all recognition.") In "Contraband" he plays a man who can get you anything you want. And "Hello New Day" and "Andele" rock almost as hard as anything he has ever done. But some of the stuff here is just a little too trite or a little too sappy. And the reggae beat behind "Bottom of the Bay" and Mexican horns on "Lemons" feel contrived and added on just for effect. Yet both songs will stay in the listener's head for days, and both promise to be to evoke an alcohol-stenched sweatfest when played live, and the live show has always been what Roger Clyne is all about.

- www.azpeacemakers.com
- **CD \$13.99 @ Amazon**



Todd Snider

PEACE, LOVE AND ANARCHY

Oh Boy Records

While most performers these days try to be as clean and polished as possible, there are those who prefer their musicians to be a little rough around the edges. On his cleanest and shiniest days, songwriting genius Todd Snider would get booted off AMERICAN IDOL for being too, well, human. He's a barefoot guy with a guitar who would rather busk on dirty street corners than play for Simon Cowell. This CD of b-sides, rarities and demos (plus one haiku) is his dirtiest affair yet, not in content, but in style. But every once in a while, it's good to wallow in the mud. On the tender "Feel Like I'm Falling in Love," he sounds like he stumbled out of bed, lit up a cigarette, pulled out his guitar and pressed play on his four-track. He offers up his usual humor as he quasi-yodels through the middle-aged male anthem "Combover Blues" or warns his friend to stay away from a certain "Barbie Doll," a song he co-wrote with friend, Jack Ingram.

Most of these unpolished gems seem to have been written during the time of his masterwork, EAST NASHVILLE SKYLINE, as quite a few songs here pertain to his favorite city. The song "East Nashville Skyline," which never appeared on the CD that bears its name, is perfect Snider. He pays homage to the signs advertising discount cigarettes and liquor, while he laments over the loss of things that make the part of Nashville on the other side of the Cumberland River so special, like Phoenix Radio. "It went off of the air so that more Sheryl Crow could come on," he surmises disgustedly. Humor and pathos; nobody does it better than Snider.

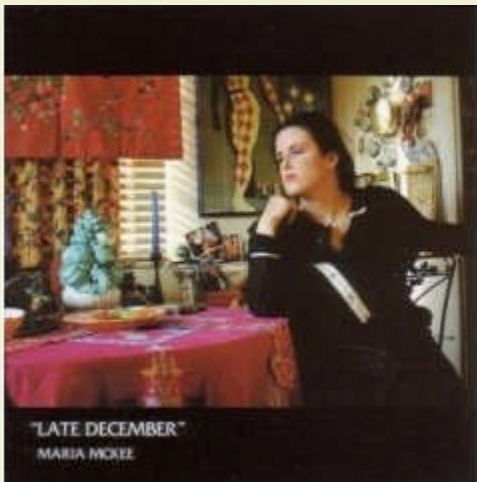
- ToddSnider.net
- [CD \\$13.99 @ Amazon](#)



Jenny Owen Youngs
BATTEN THE HATCHES
Nettwerk

Although she comes off sounding like nothing more than a clone of jazzy pop songstress Erin McKeown on the opening song, "Porchrail," throughout the remainder of BATTEN THE HATCHES, Youngs proves that she is so much more. On this, her major label debut, Youngs pulls off an impossibility in today's music world; sincerity with accessibility. With a voice full of rich goeey goodness, she can purr as well as she can rant. Her stories ring true and are catchy to boot. It's a shame "Fuck Was I" is assured of no radio airplay, as it is a gorgeous lament. Youngs makes the banjo sexy and beautiful on "p.s.," and as she bops her way through the cathartic "Drinking Song," she demonstrates that she can rock with as much depth and pop sensibility as Tanya Donnelly or KT Tunstall. The only contrived moment on the entire CD is using flavor of the month Regina Spektor as the voice leaving the message on her answering machine on "Voice on Tape." But she should not be penalized for minor misdemeanor. Youngs is deep, fun, musical, and real, and for that she should be commended.

- JennyOwenYoungs.com
 - [CD \\$13.97 @ Amazon](http://Amazon.com)
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Maria McKee
LATE DECEMBER
Viewfinder Records/Cooking Vinyl

Those who know Maria McKee as the cowpunk rocker who fronted the alt-country band Lone Justice have not heard her lately. Her last two releases, *HIGH DIVE* and *PEDDLIN' DREAMS*, showcased a different McKee; one who was more interested in arrangements and showing off her powerful vocals through operatic and Broadway-styled songs. She continues in that same vein on *LATE DECEMBER*. The opening title track, with its gospel chorus and finger snapping, sounds like something out of the Annie Lennox song book after she made the successful transition from rock singer to chanteuse.

McKee's voice is arguably even stronger than Lennox's, and it is because of this that she is able to rise above the overproduced miasma that has marred her recent works. With age, her voice seems to have deepened a bit and also acquired a touch of grit. She can still shatter glass a football field length away, but now her low notes have some meat on them as well. That said, one can't imagine wondering just how great songs like "Too Many Heroes," "Destine" and "Good Heart" would sound if she just flailed away at them with the wild abandon she displayed in her younger days instead of hitting every note precisely. McKee has a voice that would make all American Idol winners want to crawl back into their parents' basement where they belong. She's just still searching for the perfect material with which to showcase it.

- MariaMcKee.com
- [CD \\$13.99 @ Amazon](http://Amazon.com)

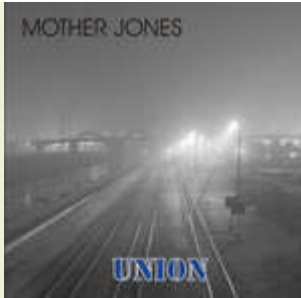


Tim Mahoney
STAY/LEAVE
Oarfin Records

Minneapolis's Tim Mahoney has that type of sweet, gentle voice that makes the teenage girls swoon. There's not a hint of edge or danger to it. And therein lay the problem. On earlier CDs, with the Blue Meenies, Mahoney used to rock a bit harder. He tried to make it big with *3 DIFFERENT VIEWS*, and when that flopped badly, he went into a more acoustic mode, mostly for financial reasons. Since the gentler sounding Mahoney sold more product, he decided to stick with a good thing. Although he plays with a band here, he makes sure to keep everything on an even keel. That's a pity.

STAY/LEAVE is a good idea. The first half is love songs, the second half are, um, leave songs. It would be a great place to see two sides of Mahoney; a sensitive strummer and an angry rocker. But he sounds just as wimpy and lovelorn on the leave side as he does on the stay side. In fact, it's hard to tell why some songs ended up on one side as opposed to the other. I guess there's something to be said for cohesiveness, but in this case it only leads to pop pabulum.

- TimMahoney.com
- [CD \\$14.98 @ Amazon](http://Amazon.com)



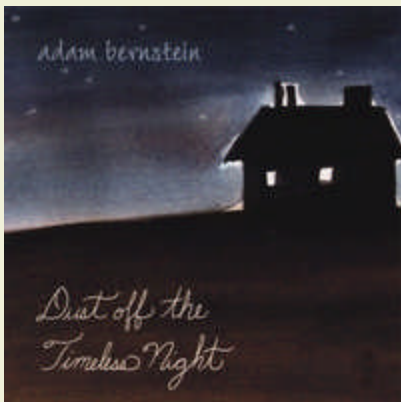
Mother Jones

UNION

Rising Sun Records

With the demise of bands such as the Grateful Dead, Phish and String Cheese Incident, and the death of Widespread Panic's Michael Howser, jam band rock has taken a beating as of late. Where are the tie-dye wearing, VW van-driving masses to go to hear some good tunes? The answer is to a Mother Jones show. On UNION, Mother Jones demonstrates that they have what it takes to carry on the toked up torch. Their sound covers everything from early style Santana to the ragged grooves of the Grateful Dead. Co-lead singer, Son Vo, no doubt knows the entire Janis Joplin and Jefferson Airplane era Glace Slick songbooks, even if her vocals are not quite on their level. Yes, some of the songs are a bit too generic rock sounding, but it is quite obvious that all of this will sound great live, including the barn-burning bluegrass "Milkin' the Cows," which is sure to send the patchouli flying.

- [**MotherJonesBand.com**](http://MotherJonesBand.com)



Adam Bernstein

DUST OFF THE TIMELESS NIGHT

Aztac Records

Adam Bernstein is a smart guy. He writes songs with titles like "The Poets of Avarice," "Another Vote for Reincarnation" and "Circumstance Provides No Peace." He hangs around with people like the guys from They Might Be Giants. While he has their brain power, he chooses not to be as goofy. His songs are lyrically and intellectually rich, without being condescending or ostentatious. His slightly flat voice only enriches the character in his songs. This is music to sit down and listen to. That said, it's hard to listen to this disc all the way through. While it is not musically boring, and Bernstein throws in the occasional keyboard for variation, nothing ever reaches out and grabs the listener. Hooks abound, but are quickly forgotten. This CD is an anomaly. While you listen to it, it will sound fairly tasty, but you'll always end up reaching for a different disc after your initial listen.