

Dave's Record Reviews

#3

For the AZ Audio Club ~ May 2021

*Note from Dave: In the reviews I am doing for AAVC I cover admittedly older-release music, of albums I think that people may have missed and might (or IMO **should**) be interested in. Being into Americana, rock, folk, and the like, what I review may not be to others' tastes. If you are so inclined to write reviews of more current releases, classical, or modern jazz music, I'm sure ye editor Roy will be glad of your submissions. Whatever your taste, and in any case – happy listening!*

Steve Earle – **Guitar Town**

(MCA, CD & LP, 1986)

Guitar Town is the debut album of singer-songwriter Steve Earle and his band, the Dukes. The album has many outstanding songs, well written, produced and performed. Released in 1986, it topped the Billboard country album charts and the title song reached #7 on the country singles charts. Accolades were many, among them two Grammy nominations in 1987. It is regarded as one of the finest syntheses of country and rock ever, and in many respects it is Earle's best album. The sound is clean and well-recorded, and it has seen reissues and remastering. Though Earle's songwriting *might* be said to have improved on latter albums, those invariably and unfortunately sound heavy and congested by comparison. My favorite cut on the album is "Goodbye Is All We've Got Left," of which one reviewer said, "the most mainstream song here, and probably the disc's weakest song." Bah – what do reviewers know anyway? (Yes, I know – I'm reviewing...) At least he concluded his review by calling the album, "A modern classic," and that cannot be argued with.

Mary Chapin Carpenter – **Shooting Straight in the Dark**

(CD only, Columbia, 1990)

Mary C-C has had a very successful career, turning out 16 well-received studio albums in the last 34 years. Her music was classified as "country" by Columbia for promotional purposes, but in reality it transcends that label. (I think the broad category of "Americana" is as good a fit as can be found.) Her most successful release was 1992's **Come on Come On**, and it is a truly fine album. But **Shooting** is my favorite. It features an excellent cast of supporting musicians and was mastered by Bob Ludwig. One song, "Down at the Twist and Shout," a – ahem – "country" rocker if ever there was, won a Grammy. But my favorite cut is the simple and haunting "Halley Came to Jackson." Not every song is a winner, but the album as a whole is a very fine listen indeed.

Duane Eddy

(LP & CD, Capitol, 1987)

Eddy's career as a guitar idol spanned some 56 years, 36 albums, and many awards. His heyday was in the 1960's, when his distinctive "twangin'" guitar sound, string of hits, and good looks made him an international star. This self-titled album from relatively late in his career remains a wonderful showcase for the man's genuine talent and style. Of course, with the stellar supporting cast assembled here (including George Harrison, Paul McCartney, Jeff Lynne, Ry Cooder, David Lindley, Steve Cropper, and others) he probably couldn't go too far wrong. It's a more developed, layered sound than his earlier work, but his trademark guitar remains unmistakable in every cut. A couple cuts drag, but most rock right along, with Eddy's solid guitar work propelling some very engaging and rousing instrumental music. I haven't heard the CD version, but the production and pressing of the LP are very good indeed.

John Stewart – **Airdream Believer**

(CD only, Shanachie, 1995)

John Stewart (1939–2008) was a giant of Americana music. He had a long career as an artist and song writer, including several years as a member of the Kingston Trio, which along with other groups/artists had hits with songs he wrote. (An example: He wrote “Daydream Believer” for the Monkees.) When the Trio called it quits in 1967 he began a solo career that spanned over 40 years and 60+ albums. His greatest commercial solo success was the album **Bombs Away Dream Babies** (1979) with friends Stevie Nicks and Lindsay Buckingham, which included three songs that charted in the Top 40. **Airdream Believer** (subtitled **A Retrospective**) began with the concept of revisiting some of Stewart’s favorite songs of his own plus a few others he really liked, but it became something *significantly* more. No mere retrospective this, it grew into a superb reimagining of the songs and a rock-pop tour-de-force, the songs notably superior to their original versions. Although there are a couple slightly below par cuts here, there are no *bad* cuts of the 14 on this album, a claim that I would make for perhaps only 5 or 6 other albums I know of. Among the *many* gems here are “Lost Her in the Sun,” “Get Rhythm,” “People in the Mirror,” and Stewart’s biggest solo hit, “Gold.” Supporting musicians include Nanci Griffith, Johnny Cash, Roseanne Cash, and his ex-Kingston Trio mates. I have most of Stewart’s albums, but this one is never far from my CD deck and has my highest possible recommendation. Someday some discerning record company will reissue this in LP format, and when it does I will definitely be waiting in line.

Gary U.S Bonds – **On the Line**

(LP & CD, EMI, 1982)

Gary U.S. Bonds was best known as a rhythm and blues singer, and achieved his greatest success in the late ‘50’s and early 60’s. He had a #1 hit in 1961 with the song “Quarter to Three.” In 1963 he was the opening act for a Beatles tour in Europe. His career languished for many years, until a longtime fan by the name of Bruce Springsteen took an interest in helping to revive it. This album, and another called **Dedication** (1981), were produced by The Boss and Steve Van Zandt, and feature them and the E Street Band as supporting musicians. I mean, how much cred do you need? The result is great stuff – very real, very earnest, driving music that swings between soul and rock in places and combines the two in others. Call it soul-rock. My first hearing of the song “Soul Deep” motivated me to acquire and explore the album. The **Dedication** album is also good, but **On the Line** is definitely the better of the two IMO. The two albums are combined on a 2009 CD that is billed as “remastered.” I have not heard it, but I’d bet that it’s probably pretty good.

CLASSICS CORNER

Nitty Gritty Dirt Band & Various – **Will the Circle Be Unbroken** (LP & CD, United Artists, 1972)

As the early ‘70s dawned the NGDB was a moderately successful band with some very eclectic albums to their credit. For their 7th album they conceived of a generation-spanning project bringing together many great country and bluegrass musicians performing classic songs. Doc Watson, Roy Acuff, Mother Maybelle Carter, Merle Travis and more signed on. The album was recorded straight to two-track masters, usually on the first or second take, and the resulting sonics are excellent. Included on the 3-disc album are brief moments of the artists chatting about their music or a song they’re performing, giving the whole thing a very honest, spontaneous feel. The final product is regarded as a landmark, rejuvenating the careers of many of its aging participants and introducing their music to a much wider audience than they had previously achieved. It has since been remastered and re-released. If you have never experienced it you should give it a try.

The album was so successful it spawned two sequels years later, Volume 2 (1989) and Volume 3 (2002), both of which are quite good but not quite as impressive as the original.