

Hit List

covers, the Steffey original instrumental "Deep Rough" shows he can write a first-class tune.

Steffey's picking is impeccable as always. His first pass on the instrumental "Half Past Four" has a rhythmic exactitude few players can equal.

The overall feel of the CD is relaxed perfection. While not as tightly orchestrated as Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver or Alison Krauss and Union Station, the playing is still precise, with a modern bluegrass twist. Steffey may be the bandleader here, but he doesn't step

out as much as you'd expect from a solo effort. He's content to assemble a crack band, then join in the fun as an equal participant. — SS



Greg Foresman
Kodiak

Self-distributed
You might not expect a solo record

from a Nashville studio ace and Martina McBride's touring guitarist to be a pop-rock killer. But Foresman's influences run the gamut, with the melodic pop of "In Your Light" hinting at the Beatles/George Harrison influence in the guitar sounds, and a back-track guitar-out that is perfectly fitting. "Suicide Bomber" is a song to and about a mass murderer that sets its deadly serious subject matter to a wall of pop sound with great orchestration. Foresman's electric fills help set the feel.

"I Know Better" is a patient funk where

Foresman plays tasty guitar through a wah. Quiet, slinky slide-guitar propels the light pop-funk of "All You Got," a song is set up by a descending chord sequence that moves across bubbling percussion. Foresman's vocals are given an airy production that matches the ethereal feel of the tunes. It's a laid-back record, with every song having a familiar feel; "Goin' To the Country" brings to mind Neil Young's "Are You Ready for the Country," and it's tough to hear "Big Sky Country" without recalling the late Chris Whitley's gem.



Walter Trout,

Unspoiled by Progress: 20

Years of Hardcore Blues. (Provogue) Trout continues to be one of the hardest working blues-rock acts out there. This disc serves up rare and unreleased recordings from his 20 years as a solo artist. At times you might think there's too much guitar, but Trout's playing is always loud and full of fire. — JH



Lou Reid and Carolina,

My Own Set of Rules (Rural Rhythm)

Reid is among bluegrass' preeminent vocalists. His latest release demonstrates why. Leading his quartet through 13 tunes, Reid serves up classic vocals and hot mandolin solos. Guest artist Ron Stewart adds fiddle, but the band's tight harmony vocals and precise arrangements are the shining stars here. — SS



George Benson,

Songs and Stories (Monster/Concord)

A guitar feast, with Toninho Horta, Steve Lukather, Wah Wah Watson, Paul Jackson, Jr., Jubu, Norman Brown, Ray Parker, Jr., Lee Ritenour, and co-producer/bassist Marcus Miller; the head honcho is, of course, Benson, who dazzles with a low-string solo (and soulful vocal) on "Rainy Night In Georgia" and strips the schmaltz away from Christopher Cross' "Sailing" for a stunning instrumental. — DF



Los Texmexians,

Borders Y Bailes (Smithsonian/Folkways)

The bajo sexto/accordion driven conjunto Texjano dance music of Los Texmexians is delightfully catchy. Influenced

extra! EXTRA!

by Flaco Jimenez, the style's leading light, the high-stepping music makes sitting still nearly impossible. The band's archetypal but fresh, lively sounds ("El Circo") make the music's popularity in the Southwest easily understandable and should help spread its appeal far beyond its home base. — RA



Sarah Bettens,

Never Say Goodbye (V2 Records)

In addition to her androgynous good looks, Sarah Bettens is blessed with an arresting voice and copious amounts of musical talent. This CD combines studio cuts with live performances; her covers of "Cry Me a River" and "I Can't Make You Love Me" rank among the best. She also plays a mean bass guitar. — SS



Grant Langston,

Stand Up Man, (MSG Records)

Langston serves up traditional country, but throws in a new twist here and there. It helps that he's a wonderful songwriter who can tell a story to go along with the honky-tonk guitar served up by he and Larry Marciano. — JH



Isaac Hayes,

Buttered Soul (Stax)

One half of Stax' hit-writing duo (with David Porter), Hayes broke that mold with his jazzy 1967 debut. But nobody was prepared for this groundbreak-

ing '69 follow-up, which paired Burt Bacharach and Jimmy Webb covers with extended jams, yet still yielded two hit singles. Barkay Michael Toles' effects-laden guitar gets plenty of room to stretch out. — DF



Gus Harless,

Acoustic Ballads & Blues (Shaker Sound)

Gus Harless is a harmonica/guitar playing bluesman and the son of a blues man — Shaker Microphones founder Joe Harless. Reminiscent of Steve Forbert's best, but grittier, darker ("Running Red") these thoughtful folk-bluesy originals ("Trust Love") and adaptations ("Rising Sun Blues") shows his daddy raised him right; high marks on all counts. — RA



Brandon Rickman,

Young Man, Old Soul (Rural Rhythm)

Lone-some River Band's lead singer/guitarist's first solo album highlights his special musical talents. In addition to playing most of the lead and backing guitar, Rickman also handles the mandolin parts. Guests include Randy Kohrs on dobro, Jenee Fleenor on fiddle, and Larry Cordle on harmony vocals. — SS



Willie Nelson,

American Classic (Blue Note)

Nelson's nasal twang may reek of country, but his phrasing is actu-

ally more suited to jazz — as he proved on 1978's *Stardust*, and subsequent albums like *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*. Here, his flat-picked gut-string alternates with Anthony Wilson's warm-toned archtop on standards like "On The Street Where You Live." Also included are duets with Norah Jones and Diana Krall. — DF



The Del-Lords,

Frontier Days, Johnny Comes Marching Home, Based on a True Story (American Beat Records)



It's nice to see these three mid-'80s records released for general consumption. The Del-Lords were a rompin', stompin' rock-and-roll band that got lost in the mess that was '80s radio. Led by Scott Kempner, they threw out a blend of punk, pop, and rock that works on a number of levels. — JH



The Wailin' Jennys,

Live at the Mauch Chunk Opera House (Red House Records)

The Jennys display their flair for popularizing traditional folk. Songs such as "Motherless Child" and "Bring Me a Li'l Water Silvy" sound fresh and exciting in their hands. Joined by new member Heather Masse and sideman Jeremy Penner on violin and fiddle, The Wailin'

Jennys deliver more than an hour of first-class music. — SS



Muddy Waters,

Live/Fillmore Auditorium — San Francisco, CA

(Chess/Geffen) No longer boasting the Mount Rushmore of legends of his '50s band, Muddy's 1966 sextet still sported facile, interweaving guitars courtesy Sammy Lawhorn and Luther "Georgia Boy/Snake" Johnson, with George Smith starring on harp. The liners don't credit Waters' guitar playing, but that's obviously his piercing slide on "Long Distance Call" and others. And dig his 15-bar arrangement of "Rock Me." — DF



Emile Menasché,

Overtones (self-distributed)

Menasché is a writer who has done music for films, and this is a beautiful set of acoustic music that evokes many moods, most of them quiet. Musically, there's a mix of Latin, jazz, and folk that works wonderfully with Menasché's mastery of the instrument. It's simple and comforting music in a day and age when it's needed. — JH



J. Hansen,

Give The Drummer Some (Greaseland)

For the past seven years, Hansen has drummed with harpist/vocalist Rick Estrin's Nightcats (formerly Little Charlie & The Nightcats with Charlie Baty). Here, he gets a chance to flex his composing and singing muscles — and he makes the most of it. Co-producer/guitarist Kid Andersen matches Hansen's versatility on this impressive, lively set of rockabilly, blues, swing, gospel, and even country. — DF