

Round up

Reviews of the latest CDs

Reviews by Linda F. Cauthen, Jeffrey A. Cooke, Robyn Flans, Neil Haislop, Darryl Morden and Stacey Szewczyk

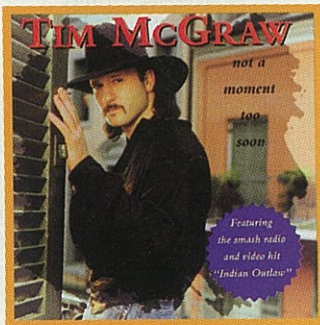
Not a Moment Too Soon
Tim McGraw
Curb

Tim's debut for Curb went almost totally unnoticed a couple of years back, but he certainly doesn't have that problem this time around. His "politically incorrect" but relentlessly catchy "Indian Outlaw" propelled this CD to the top of the chart in its first week, and landed Tim in hot water with Native American organizations over its cliché-ridden view of the first Americans. If that bothers you, then you're probably not going to buy this CD anyway. "It Doesn't Get Any Countryer Than This" mines the same territory as Confederate Railroad's "Elvis & Andy," a city gal who knows the way to a country boy's heart. "Give It to Me Strait" is a lighthearted drinking song about a certain country singer whose songs are made for drowning your problems. "Down on the Farm" shows how country folks like to party, and "Refried Dreams" is a Buffett-ish look at the morning after the night before. "Please Don't Take the Girl" is too maudlin and bogged down in sentiment for my tastes, but lovers of syrupy ballads will probably eat it up. For Tim McGraw, success is coming *Not a Moment Too Soon*. (L.F.C.)

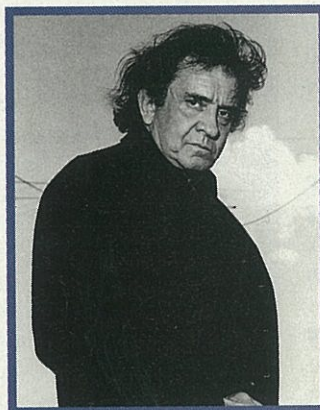
American Recordings
Johnny Cash
American Recordings

The first Johnny Cash record on L.A.'s American label is more a "collection of songs" than anything either Cash or American has done to date. If it sounds like it was recorded in someone's living room, that's because it was—the producer's and Cash's own, with two tracks recorded during a performance at a small Los Angeles nightclub. With only the

accompaniment of an acoustic guitar, Cash does songs by artists ranging from Kris Kristofferson ("Why Me, Lord?") to former frontman for '80s punk band the Misfits, Glenn Danzig ("Thirteen")—along with a few Cash originals like "Delia's Gone" and "Drive On." Unfortunately, the simple voice-and-guitar delivery flattens the diverse voices of the various songs, while the no-frills recordings blanket this latest



Johnny Cash record in a documentary tone that would not seem out of place on the Smithsonian's Folkways label, which preserves the songs of dying cultures for posterity. The fact is that Johnny Cash is alive and well and just signed to a thriving new record label. Why bury the man before his time? He has one of the few voices in the history of music to have sold over 50 million records, and if, in the end, there is little else to recommend *American Recordings*, there is ample opportunity on it to hear the reason for Cash's success. His voice has attained the grain of hickory wood. It's grave at times but still very handsome and often strangely reminiscent of June Carter Cash's kindly tremolo. Dignity is inherent in Johnny Cash's voice, and some back-up—another guitar and perhaps an upright bass—wouldn't have affected that in the least. In fact, some embellishment would probably have made *American Recordings* a more listenable record. As it stands, one gets the feeling that it's too serious a record to simply enjoy.



Producer Rick Rubin reportedly called in a slew of Los Angeles rockers to back up Cash when work on the record began but eventually scrapped the whole idea, deciding instead to do a recording which was basic to the extreme—an idea akin to hiding the bong when grandpa comes to visit. Sure Johnny Cash is getting old, but he's still on par with the Rolling Stones and The Beach Boys in terms of Top 100 pop hits—a legend, of course, but still very much alive. Fans will have to wait until the next record for reassurance of that. (S.S.)

Sweetheart's Dance
Pam Tillis
Arista

There are many country music megastars who can attest to the writing prowess of Pam Tillis, and there is a vast multitude of fans who will tell you what an incredible vocalist she is. Surprisingly, only three cuts off this album were cowritten by Pam, but Tillis proves that her vocal expertise can definitely make songs she didn't write her own. This album opens up with "Mi Vida Loca (My Crazy Life)," a punchy number written by Pam along with Jess Leary. The chorus has a south-of-the-border flair which makes you want to fiesta. From there we go to the title track, which you're not quite sure whether you should waltz or two-step to. Next up is a song by another songwriter supreme, Matraca Berg, called "Calico Plains," which Matraca cowrote with Mark Noble for her debut album. There it was Matraca's song; here it certainly belongs to Pam Tillis, with a touch of Marty Robbins. "When You Walk in The Room" is a song reflecting every single heart looking for love and hoping that it just came through the door. However, you won't find soap bubbles in the music. Mary-Chapin Carpenter harmonizes with Pam on this one. The first single off the album, "Spilled Perfume," is probably quite familiar to you by now. Pam teams up with another super writer, Dean Dillon, and I'm hoping that this will not be their last collaboration. If this song doesn't go to Number 1, you'll hear my jaw hit the