



Shawn Starski

## Starski Steps Out

**A**fter seven years in the band of ace harpist Jason Ricci, guitarist/singer Shawn Starski has set out on his own, and if his debut record is any indication, he should have a long and inspiring career. The music is centered in the blues, and Starski is an exciting player who knows the ins and outs of the music.

His slinky tone matches the big beat of “Sea Of Faces” perfectly. “Dirty Deal” is a tough Texas shuffle with great tone. Funk makes several appearances with steady ninth-chord riffs and single-note punches driving it on “Was It You.” His slide guitar is the force behind the electric country blues of “How It Come To Be,” where tasty hammer-ons on the open G string are the hook the song keeps coming back to. His strong command of the blues aside, things

really get exciting when he steps out of that comfort zone.

The instrumental “Hallows Eve” con-



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Cook It Up

tinually switches tonal centers and features a vibe that confirms the title fits. As the song moves in and out of the different modulations, Starski navigates the changes beautifully. Unlike most the other cuts here, the tone is jazzy and so are the chops. His rhythm section, with Todd Edmunds on bass and Steve Johnson on drums, drive the song, and saxophonist Cole Bergus makes his only

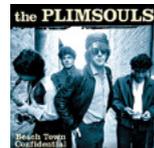
appearance, matching Starski’s soloing. Another instrumental, “For Us,” is a minor-key slow blues that allows

Starski’s jazz side to pop up again – a tour de force employing octaves and a great use of dynamics.

His years spent as a sideman are illustrated on two cuts featuring singer Elle, whose raspy, soul-inflected voice supplies a nice contrast to Starski’s everyman vocals elsewhere on the record. “Cry Baby” is the perfect vehicle for Shawn’s slightly distorted tone, while “The Truth” is a Southern soul song with nice chord changes and a key modulation into the solo and back that is both surprising and sweet.

While there are plenty of faces on the blues guitar scene, this debut from Starski shows him to be a force to be reckoned with. – *John Heidt*

bass-to-treble and volume dynamics. – *Rick Allen*



### The Plimsouls

Live at the Golden Bear 1983

Alive Records

Call it alt rock, power pop, or even neo-postpunk, but when the Plimsouls barreled out of Los Angeles in the early 1980s, they epitomized everything that was right about music at the time. Mixing strong hooks, harmony vocals, and stinging guitar work in a major-label release with a song featured in a hit movie should have been the recipe for success. It wasn’t, and the band sank from sight. In any event, this live recording would never have been released at the time, as it would have competed with studio recordings in record stores. Too bad, because this is one hot performance caught on tape and finds the band firing on all cylinders.

Listening to group leader Peter Case and company running through material from their then-recent Geffen album and 1981’s self-titled indie debut along with a smattering of well-selected covers (British mods the Creation’s “Making Time,” West Coast gods Moby Grape’s “Fall On You”) is a delightful, take-you-back-there episode of highly charged and brilliantly delivered live-and-direct rock and roll heaven.

History is littered with bands that should have made it but did not for any of a dozen reasons, and for the Plimsouls a release of this recording would not have made any difference. But for fans of the period, there is no better document of how compelling early-’80s music could be. Case went solo in the mid-’80s, arguably to greater success than the Plimsouls, but never really regained the infectious, pure joy that was captured here. – *Eric C. Shoaf*



### Nick Moran Trio

No Time Like Now

Manor Sound Music

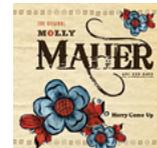
Moran and band are definitely an organ trio steeped in the tradition, but they aren’t afraid to mix things up a little. That’s immediately made clear on the opener, “Strange Brew.” Yes, it’s the Cream classic, and it’s the only non-original here. It’s deconstruction and reconstruction by the band works incredibly well. The funk wouldn’t sound out of place on a Grant Green record from 50 years ago.

From there we hear plenty of organ trio style tunes, including the funk of “Slow Drive” with some slinky soloing from Moran and the soul-meets-jazz of “Say Hi To Paris,” with its instantly hummable head and tail, and Moran’s funky, crisp soloing. In between, some

roads are taken. “Intention” has a light, airy feel that hints at “new age” while keeping its jazz pedigree. “My Beautiful” starts with a slightly chorused descending line before a Latin feel moves in with Moran zipping through the changes with ease. He even turns on the distortion for a bit of a fusion feel on the bopper “Wishful Thinking.”

Organist Brad Whiteley proves to be the perfect foil for Moran’s soloing, supplying the bed for the guitarist’s always-interesting solos. Whiteley also proves no slouch in the soloing department, with imaginative and funky turns on pretty much every cut. Drummer Chris Benham drives the music, covering all the various bases that Moran’s compositions hit. He’s instantly swinging on the bop of “The Physicist Transformed” and has the perfect touch on the stately ballad “No Time Like Now.”

It seems like every year brings another half-dozen New York jazz guitarists who will be around for a while, and Moran is the latest to add to that list. – *JH*



### Molly Maher And Her Band Of Disbelievers

Merry Come Up

Real-Phonic Records

Molly Maher is blessed. She writes songs that ring true. Her singing is a fine balance of deep and soulful, somewhere between Lucinda Williams and Emmylou Harris. And to top it all, she picks a mean guitar.

On her fourth release, she leads her loose-knit Disbelievers through a sweet blend of folk, bluesy, and country-fried rock. Maher walks a perfect line between catchy and cool.

This is a rare singer/songwriter album that’s got a heavy dose of guitars throughout. Maher moves between acoustic rhythm guitar and Dobro on most all tracks. She’s backed by Erik Koskinen and Paul Bergen on an array of slide, tremoloed, baritone guitars, some vintage. The frontline is obviously having fun with its bag of tricks, which seemingly includes experimenting with most every setting on their guitars and amps, plus a healthy selection of pedals and vibrato units. More power to ’em!

The opener, “Somewhere Down the Road,” is radio-friendly, alt-country hit material with gorgeous guitar work throughout. Maher’s vocals are accented by shimmering chords and highlighted by a wah-wah solo that sounds incongruous – and killer. The recording quality is clear and warm throughout, a true pleasure. “Blinded By Love” rides on a reggae backbeat and swirling organ lines, a supremely cool mix that creates a great lilting groove for a country song. “Shook Down” is juke-joint blues with a mysterious mood, bouncing between overdriven guitars and harp.