

star. Her solos are clean, with perfect timing, but not flashy. In fact, if you heard this album without knowing whose it was, you'd probably not guess the banjo player was bandleader. Her husband, Wayne, takes much flashier solos, as does Grier, whose first solo on the opening cut, "Don't Tread On Me," will leave guitar players shaking their heads in amazement.

Second Season is a grand way to appreciate a banjo player worthy of being included among the first tier of contemporary players. — SS



The Bridge
Blind Man's Hill

Hyena Records

Singer/guitarist Cris Jacobs and singer/mandolinist Kenny Liner co-write the music for this Baltimore-based band. Jacobs writes songs with inherent soul. Whether slinky funk (like the opener, "Honey Bee") or blues/rock with a ragtime feel ("Old White Lightning") they ooze soul and taste. The latter even includes an understated wah solo. And though it would seem a contradiction in terms, it works perfectly.

Jacobs' slinky, popping guitar through the former is about as simultaneously out-front and unobtrusive as a guitar part can get. His playing is never in the way, but the song couldn't exist without it. Jacobs' vocals are gutsy, gritty, and perfectly complement his writing.

It all mixes perfectly with the songs by Liner, whose "Dirtball Blues" is bluegrass/country heaven. He has a lighter, more airy voice than Jacobs and his lyrics tend to be a little funnier, often with an edge. His mandolin skills are excellent, and he complements Jacobs perfectly while soloing. While most of the songs with a country feel are written by Liner, Jacobs' "country" solos are killer — check out his banjo rolls that kick off "Born Ramblin'."

As long as bands like this are around, roots music will survive. — JH



Jinx Jones

Live Twang In Finland

Home Brand Records

San Francisco's Jinx Jones teams with two terrific Finnish musicians for the making of this fine live record. Henry Valanne (drums) and Ari Sjöblom (bass) are both adept at the various forms of Jones' music, and they are many.

Primarily a rockabilly guitarist, he stays true to form here on tracks like "Double Talk Baby," "Honey Hush," and "Either Way I Lose." But he mixes elements of other music, as well, with solos that delve deep into R&B and country. "I Need a Good Girl Bad" shows his jazz chops with a nice chord solo followed by octaves. "Honky Tonk Playgirl" jumps into country with chicken pickin' that bounces out of the speakers. And then there's surf-style instrumentals that prove the twang of rockabilly and country isn't far removed from that form.

And in a gutsy move, the CD ends with a dazzling cover of Roy Buchanan's masterpiece "The Messiah Will Come Again." But Jones pulls it off with ease — and soul.

While his playing is beyond reproach, Jones has also developed into a top-flight vocalist, with loads of the attitude needed for the songs he does. He hiccups where he should, and sometimes where he shouldn't, but it always fits. Doing R&B more, he growls with the same ferocity Brian Setzer developed over the years.

Recorded during several shows in Finland, the music gets appreciative yelps and howls of glee from the audience. After Jones' last studio record, *Rumble and Twang*, this is a perfect showcase. — JH



Steffen Schackinger

ElectriGuitaristry

Candy Rat Record

An oddly (but aptly) titled album of very melodious instrumentals that conjure many moods, Danish guitarist Steffen Schackinger shines on cuts like "Major Inventions," which is laden with spacey volume swells and middle-eastern feel.

The title track hints at Schackinger's rock leanings, with inventive, layered guitars creating fine, melodic soloing. Its funky midsection shows off his great chops. Then he proves comfortable playing jazz, too, like on the two-minute chordal opening of "On a Rainy Night." Its last 90 seconds are a solo reminiscent of Carlos Santana. Jazz chops resurface on "City Lights," with a nod to Wes Montgomery on the front end and to more modern jazz fusionists in the middle. "Twister" is a rock instrumental that would fit comfortably on a record by Satch and Vai. It's got a great melody, a stompin' rhythm track, and a quiet middle. The record wraps up with "Your Song," which lets Schackinger shine on nylon-string acoustic while a haunting voice floats

Greg Miner



Harp-Guitar Ear Candy

THIS FOLLOW-UP to *Beyond Six Strings* features 13 guitarists, each playing an original solo instrumental on 12 different models of harp guitar (Pete Bradshaw and Andy Wahlberg each employ a 2007 Merrill model). The music mostly falls into the "new age" category, but is as varied as the players and instruments, and is anything but wallpaper.

For his recording debut on harp guitar, Alex de Grassi chose probably the most radical instrument featured here (a 39-string Harp-Sympitar built by Fred Carlson) for a beautiful variation on "Greensleeves." Meanwhile, Muriel Anderson plays a nylon-string "harp requinto" (by Mike Doolin) and

Tim Donahue employs an electric model of his own design.

In the vintage category, there are a 1913 Gibson (played by Tom Shinness), Carter Lancaster's 1914 Dyer Style 6, and a 1912 Knutsen "zither harp guitar," utilized by label head and producer Gregg Miner. The latter features three different

Conspicuous in his absence, of course, is perhaps the greatest (and certainly most visible) proponent of the harp guitar in recent years, the late Michael Hedges. But his influence is clearly evident, as on Lancaster's "Jubal's Tomb."

Most refreshing is the fact that this is

more than just a demonstration record. The music stands on its own, and you needn't be a harp guitar aficionado (or even guitarist) to enjoy it. It is nice to see and hear such glorious examples of luthiery, though. The ultimate would be to combine this with David

Grisman's *Tone Poem* series, for an album of duets featuring vintage mandolins and harp guitars. — Dan Forte



Various artists

Harp Guitar Dreams

Harp Guitar Music

banks of treble strings (in addition of the six guitar strings), which Miner juggles to great effect on "Bridge Of Verdant Mist."