



**Leslie West**  
**Unusual Suspects**

Provogue

Leslie West's long career has afforded him the chance to make a lot of friends, and he shares the stage with some of them on his latest effort. Steve Lukather, Slash, Billy Gibbons, Joe Bonamassa, and Zakk Wylde (who refers to West as "dad") are the *Unusual Suspects* named in the title of this feast of boogie.

West's recent health problems (he had part of his right leg amputated in early summer) don't appear to have slowed him down any, as he trades solos in five of the cuts with the aforementioned guitar stars, and his unique blend of melody and loudness easily takes care of business on the rest of the cuts. His vocals, which seem to get better with age, have a gargled-with-rocks sensibility that is the perfect fit for this material.

On "Mudflap Mama," with Slash, the Mountain co-leader reaches back into his own history to recall "Mississippi Queen." It's about the same kind of woman, and West even quotes his solo from the earlier song. Slash makes another appearance, along with Wylde, on an unexpected version of Willie Nelson's "Turn Out the Lights." West handles acoustic while Wylde and Slash supply burning electric solos. Gibbons and West trade solos on "Standing On A Higher Ground," which comes across as a crunchy mix of ZZ Top, Mountain, and Jimi Hendrix. The Beatles' "I Feel Fine" is a surprise cover that works very well as a straight-forward boogie with the familiar riff thrown in. "Legend" features some soulful soloing from West with a lyric reminding us that veteran rockers just want to play and don't want to be turned into history. It's safe to say if West can continue to make music like this, he'll be more than just history. — JH



**Alexis Harte**  
**Spoons Of Honey**

Self-distributed

Harte's music is difficult to pin down. Perhaps "adult pop" would be closest to the mark, but he includes so many elements from such diverse sources that his music straddles a multiplicity of genres. But regardless of the category, every song on *Spoons* proves that Harte is far more than just another singer/songwriter.

With a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in ecology and environmental science, you might expect Harte to be residing in an Amazonian rain forest rather than Berkeley, California. And he did spend a three-year stint in Brazil studying

flora and fauna before deciding to follow his musical muse back to the United States.

The first thing you'll notice about Alexis Harte is his guitar playing. On most of his tunes, the guitar is the driving force that propels his music. Whether it's rhythmically precise fingerpicking on the opening tune, "As Long As You Come Home," or rustic electric slide guitar on "Less Seriously," Harte demonstrates a myriad of ways that a guitar can be employed in music making.

His vocal abilities would never get him past the initial judging panel on "American Idol," but like another independent musician, Matt The Electrician, Harte's lack of major "pipes" doesn't prevent him from using his voice for maximum effect. Often double-tracked, Harte's vocals inevitably will surprise you on first listen but feel absolutely right by the fourth or fifth time. — SS

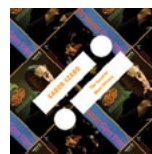


**Adam Stern**  
**High Country Gentleman**

Self-distributed

Adam Stern's follow-up to 2009's *Twang Shui* continues a trend on that album to not be pigeonholed and expands the idea even further. The Colorado-based guitarist's debut showed a six-stringer highly influenced by Tele players who leaned in the country direction. On *High Country Gentleman*, that direction shows up on "Locked Up," which serves as a vehicle to show his love for one of his heroes, Danny Gatton. The only other nod to Teles comes in "Buchanan/Bloomfield," a slow blues with some surprising gospel-inspired chord changes, Roy B.-style volume swells, and biting solos. The aptly titled "Progabilly" starts out with some nasty rockabilly playing before it delves into spacey psychedelia and metal-esque power chords.

Aside from those tunes, the record supplies lots of music that fits into the fusion category but is not clichéd or reminiscent of any of the standard music of that genre. "Geomancy" shows off a slightly distorted sound and some soulful notes playing through a song that changes keys indiscriminately. After a fusion start, "Patdown" morphs into a swinger that allows Stern to zip effortlessly through the changes using single notes and non-standard double-stops that seem to fit perfectly. Things end with "The Beginning Of Gone," and that may point in his next direction. It's an eerie song that consists of nothing but guitar and has lots of dissonant sounds before ending with a fingerpicked segment that leads us right back to Stern's Tele heroes. It has the feel of a song that was improvised on the spot or, if composed, was meant to keep you guessing — as the entire record does. — JH



**Gabor Szabo**  
**The Sorcerer/More Sorcery**

Ume

Szabo was a highly talented jazz guitarist from Hungary who, in hindsight, seems almost more important as an influence on players like Carlos Santana and Al Di Meola. However, this fine reissue revives a pair of the guitarist's albums from 1967 on the Impulse! label and more than amply asserts that Gabor was a superb guitarist in his own right.

The first album kicks off with a cover of Sonny & Cher's "The Beat Goes On," which the guitarist imbues with fast, funky runs on a very unusual jazz axe: a Martin dreadnought acoustic fitted with a magnetic soundhole pickup. On "What Is This Thing Called Love," he trades licks with co-guitarist Jimmy Stewart before taking off on a soaring improv backed solely by Hal Gordon's conga drums.

From *More Sorcery*, dig a sultry cover of Jobim's "Corcovado," which sports both tasty Latin licks and Gabor's knockout chord-melody work. Also listen to the artificial harmonics that Szabo uses for the melody on the Beatles' "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds." The arrangement may sound a bit dated and corny, but if you were a working jazz musician in 1967, it surely wasn't unusual to have a Beatles tune or two in your set list. And the Latin-percussion intro and guitar melody to "Spellbinder" will certainly remind you of Santana's lead work. Carlos, in fact, has openly named Gabor Szabo as one of his major influences. After listening to this excellent reissue, he may become one of yours, too. — PP



**The Jayhawks**  
**Mockingbird Time**

Rounder

Talk about a time warp. After the Jayhawks released their two best-known and most highly regarded albums, 1992's *Hollywood Town Hall* and 1995's *Tomorrow The Green Grass*, founder Mark Olson left for greener fields. Now, after a 16-year hiatus, the band has reformed, and their new album sounds like they never set aside their instruments.

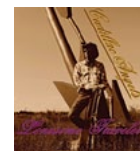
True, the Jayhawks have been playing the odd show and limited tours together since 2008, with constant and consistently good reunion shows on their Minneapolis home stages. But this new album could have been cut the tomorrow after *Tomorrow The Green Grass*. The band is back to the same personnel as on that stellar album — Olson and Gary Louris on guitars, vocals, and songwriting; founding member and bassist Marc Perlman; and later arrivals (although it's now been a decade and a half) pianist Karen Grotberg and drummer Tim

O'Reagan — and the ensemble sounds as strong as ever.

Throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the Jayhawks always seemed to be riding on the edge of stardom. Yes, they were swimming against the tide in their native Minnesota, where Prince, the Replacements, and Hüsker Dü ruled. But their alt-country sound somehow fit the mood both of Minneapolis and the national scene, with Uncle Tupelo and the like. Still, the Hawks could never quite break.

*Mockingbird Time* proves that the Jayhawks are not just an oldies act or a revival show. The opener, "Hide Your Colors," sets the scene: Olson's acoustic guitar backed by Louris' electric lines and that amazing duet of voices, all bolstered by a rock-solid rhythm section. Happily, Grotberg's piano shines through with more power and volume than ever before, balancing out the band's sound and adding a welcome honky-tonk edge. And Louris' riffs, played on his trademark vintage maroon Gibson Les Paul/SG, reverberate through the songs once again, with a melodic sense at times reminiscent of George Harrison, at others sounding like rusty barbed wire.

The new album is available in a standard edition plus a deluxe version with an added DVD disc featuring a band documentary, footage of several rehearsal sessions, and an early 1985 performance. Perhaps now's the time for the Jayhawks. — MD



**Tony Ridge And**  
**The Cadillac Angels**  
**Lonesome Traveler**

Cracked Piston Recording



**The Cadillac Angels**  
**Kicks Like A Mule**

Blood Brother Recording

Despite their ostensible differences in style, almost any song on the rockabilly oriented *Lonesome Traveler* would fit the bluesy *Kicks Like A Mule* and vice versa. All the lead guitar and most of the rhythm was done with various models from head man Tony Balbinot's enviable collection of Silvertone guitars, and his singing style, consciously modeled after Roy Orbison's, minus the operatic falsetto, is readily identifiable. That combination and Balbinot's consistently sure-handed, inventive guitar playing tie together two standout discs.

On the ghostly rockabilly stomp of the title cut for *Lonesome Traveler* or reworking Billy Boy Arnold's song of the same name for *Kicks Like A Mule*, Balbinot is a guitarist concerned with playing the *right* thing, getting all the feel and atmosphere out of his guitar, like one playing *in* the tradition not merely aping