

# Cuz's Corner

By Dennis Frost

By the time March's Folk Society newsletter reaches everyone, the daffodils will be in full bloom with spring in the Carolinas just right around the corner. Today, however, is a raw, rainy excuse for a day – perfect for staying inside and writing another edition of Cuz's Corner. As predicted, the holiday-related drought for new releases has evolved into an avalanche of highly anticipated CDs from both established artists and young up-and-comers, alike. Before I get into some of my favorites, without a doubt my gig of the month was the sold-out Gillian Welch and David Rawlings show at the Neighborhood Theatre. It's extremely difficult to put into words exactly what there is about a Dave-Gill performance that makes it transcend into high art. Gillian's songs that sound old as the hills themselves? David's wonderfully odd and unique guitar style? The two-part harmony vocals that sound like one voice? What ever it is, I cannot get enough of it. Be on the lookout for a new CD from Gillian and David in the not-so-distant future.

If ever there was a time to trade in those record store gift certificates you got for Christmas into cold, hard CDs, now is the time. Of course, since much of the music we listen to is sometimes difficult to find in the malls, I will list that all-important web site. My first recommendation comes from three young folks that met at the Black Banjo Gathering in Boone in 2005, **The Carolina Chocolate Drops**. Their brand new **Dona Got a Ramblin Mind** disc ([www.musicmaker.org](http://www.musicmaker.org)) not only carries on the black stringband tradition of the great Joe Thompson, but touches on other traditions, including Celtic, blue-

grass, and gospel. To quote Taj Mahal: "**The Carolina Chocolate Drops** can really play; their music is electrifying." When big Taj talks, I listen and you should, too! Be sure to check them out this spring at either MerleFest or The LEAF Festival.

Martha Scanlans's new CD, **The West Was Burning** ([www.sugarhillrecords.com](http://www.sugarhillrecords.com)), is a lush blend of gorgeous, mostly original acoustic tunes steeped in all the American roots traditions she grew up loving. This one was lovingly produced in Martinsville, Louisiana by none other than Dirk Powell. Special guests include Levon Helm and daughter Amy Helm of **Ollabelle** fame.

Jorma Kaukonen's new disc, **Stars in My Crown** ([www.redhouserecords.com](http://www.redhouserecords.com)), is an extremely satisfying follow-up to his last one (**Blue Country Heart**). This effort mixes originals, covers, and a healthy mix of Depression Era gospel tunes into a very spiritual feeling piece of music. I love Jorma's guitar playing - what can I say!

Moving right along, I must say I was a bit skeptical when I heard Ricky Skaggs and Bruce Hornsby were putting out a disc together, but their self-titled release ([www.skaggsfamilyrecords.com](http://www.skaggsfamilyrecords.com)) really works for me. This one is a combination of traditional tunes Ricky Skaggs arranged with new incarnations of some Hornsby originals. The bluegrass versions of **Mandolin Rain** and **Gulf of Mexico Fishing Boat Blues** really work, but the jury is still out on the kinky bluegrass version of **Super Freak**. They've got gumption for giving this one a go, I must admit!

Next, if you don't have any Patty

Griffin music in your collection, shame on you! Her brand new **Children Running Through** disc ([www.pattygriffin.com](http://www.pattygriffin.com)) might just be a great place to start. This one has everything a folk music lover could ever ask for – unbelievable songs, ethereal instrumental arrangements and that voice. Only Patty Griffin could start a song with the line "Little pink dress hanging by her knees" and proceed to tell the emotional life story of the main character in the song, while at the same time relating it to the universal female experience. This is my pick of the month and I'm sticking to it! One of my musical highlights for the month was an in studio interview and on-air performance by the two Aussies and one Brit better known as **The Greencards**. They have an upcoming March 6<sup>th</sup> release called **Viridian** ([www.thegreencards.com](http://www.thegreencards.com)) that gets the Cuz seal of approval. If you like your ballads tender, but your pickin' hot, this one's for you!

Last but not least is the new effort from **Los Lobos**. **The Town and the City** ([www.HollywoodRecords.com](http://www.HollywoodRecords.com)) returns them to the Latin groove that I fell in love with when I first heard **Kiko and the Lavender Moon**. This one backs off quite a bit from the harder rock sounds of their last two or three albums and is a satisfying effort. Well, all I can say is that there is too much music and too little time. I hope you enjoy these picks, but most importantly, I hope you get out and check out some shows, as it's all about the live performance. Have a great early spring!

Cuz

**To share your thoughts about your favorite music with Cuz, contact him either at [dcmfrost@mindspring.com](mailto:dcmfrost@mindspring.com) or 704-532-8846.**