

The Best of 2015 Critic's

In our annual round-up of the year CMP's contributors and invited industry insiders pick their best of the year

Choice

Paul Riley

THE BLOOD FEUD FAMILY SINGERS - *No Moon*

This year's best album is a stunning debut of dark Americana. The band's main songwriter Deryl Scherer is a special talent. The songs are melodic, cynical and jet black. A masterpiece. The next two selections are very close to this, but The Blood Feud Family Singers are just ahead.

IRIS DEMENT - *The Trackless Woods*

As Iris Dement moves further away from her earlier more accessible albums, she is producing the music of a true artist. The new CD features poetry from the Russian Anna Akhmatova, with music from Iris Dement. A disc of great imagination and depth emerges. Requires multiple plays to reveal it's full depth and meaning.

ANNETTE CONLON - *Life, Death And The Spaces Between*

Another superb debut from a highly gifted Americana singer/songwriter. With its strong melodies this one could sell quite well.

ASHLEY MONICAL - *Facing The Shadow*

This entertaining CD is probably the best release so far from an ex-American Idol contestant. A wonderful tour-de-force of soulful Americana. All the songs were written/co-written by Ashley Monical. A singer to watch.

GRETCHEN PETERS - *Blackbirds*

Another big winner from one of America's most important Americana singers. Good to see it sold so well.

COMMON LINNETS - *II*

The very entertaining Dutch band go from strength-to-strength with their second disc, which is even better than the first. They blend Country/Americana with a knowing pop edge. Wonderful!

LORRAINE WALDEN - *Slow Country Dancin'*

This is a fantastic treat for fans of real traditional old-school country.

MATT LAX AND NEARLY BELOVED - *This House Of Mine*

Matt Lax is one of America's most underrated songwriters. The latest CD mixes country and Americana, with some engaging melodies. Matt and the band have a strong back-catalogue as well.

ANDREA COLBURN - *Sad Songs And Switchblades*

One of the year's strangest CDs puts country music into the "weird blender", and out pops a gem of a release. Entertainment for the more adventurous country fan. Andrea Colburn, who is a fine songwriter, is a real find.

AMY SPEACE - *That Kind Of Girl*

The perfect gift for someone who has just gone through a painful break-up. More high quality songs from the underrated Americana singer. 2015 has been a very fine year for female singers. Singers who just failed to reach the Top Ten list are: Dale Watson, Mary Kaye, Brennan Leigh and Lisa Layne.



Chris Smith

ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL - *Still The King*

This list is not in any particular order but this album is certainly one of my most played in recent months. The excellent Ray Benson, Asleep at the Wheel, guest vocals from luminaries such as Brad Paisley, Merle Haggard, Robert Earl King, Willie Nelson and others - what's not to love?



WILLIE NELSON & MERLE HAGGARD - *Django and Jimmie*

Fourteen fabulous tracks from two of the most iconic figures in the business. There is no 'relaxed' 'this is how you do it' attitude and, as you would expect, some excellent musicians. This will be a CD to treasure long after these two have gone on to the great gig in the sky.

DALE WATSON - *Call Me Insane*

Whether you call it Country, Americana or, as Dale prefers, Ameripolitan, this is damn fine honky tonkin', foot stompin' enjoyment. The title of the first track *Mama's Don't Let Your Cowboys Grow Up To Be Babies* tells you everything you need to know.

CHRIS STAPLETON - *Traveller*

I was into Chris Stapleton before he was famous with no doubt be the best of choice at the C2 in March. I do wonder how many of those who joined the throng on the back of three CMA Awards will find this stage show to be what they expected. A versatile song writer with amazing vocal ability.

JESS AND THE BANDITS - *Here We Go Again*

I said in my review of this album that Jessica Clemmons has one of the finest female voices in country music and I stand by that view. It's a party album. It's an album to play in the car. It's the more modern strain of country at its finest.

KASEY MUSGRAVES - *Pageant Material*

Hit album, hit singles and loads of fun. I couldn't really not include this one. I like the delivery and I particularly admire the observational lyrics. I have yet to see Kasey Musgraves perform live and am looking forward to it immensely.

RAINTOWN - *Writing On The Wall*

At the risk of repeating myself this is slick, unpretentious and very professionally delivered. The rise in popularity of the country genre in the UK has triggered an avalanche of home grown acts but trust me when I say Raintown are easily one of the best of those acts as this album clearly demonstrates.

ALAN JACKSON - *Angels and Alcohol*

Alan's first studio album of new material in way too long was worth waiting for. Pure vintage Jackson and a must for any fan.

MADDIE & TAE - *Start Here*

Very clever lyrics, superb tongue in cheek delivery, this timely riposte to the sexism of so many second rate (but big selling) 'Bro Country' songs is a delightful acquisition for any collection. I loved it.

THE DIABLOS - *One Degree Of Separation*

I have included this album because since its release four of these excellent tracks have achieved the top spot in the Hotdisc charts. They are a great band who write great songs yet this entire collection failed to get even one nomination in this year's British Country Music Awards - which questions either my judgement or the Awards selection process. Have a listen and make up your own mind.

country

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Old Dominion

Jeremy Pinnell

Rod Picott

Critic's Choice
The best of 2015

Cam

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