

People & Places

Music

Davies' sequel disappoints

Achy Carolina Story makes stellar debut

By Scott Stroud

Carolina Story, "Lay Your Head Down" (Black River Americana)

Ben Roberts comes from Arkansas, his wife Emily is from South Dakota, and they met in Memphis a decade ago. But Nashville was always their destiny.

The couple's debut album, "Lay Your Head Down," pulsates with achy, heartfelt sentiment, delivered in tender harmony against a warmly pastoral background.

For nearly 10 years, the duo said yes to every gig request, performing in nursing homes, churches and bars. The response was encouraging, but success was not immediate.



Roberts

Still, talent this big is hard to keep down. Several odd jobs and two babies later, it landed them a record deal.

On the opening title cut, a mournful train whistle of a harmonica lays the groundwork for Ben plaintive tenor.

"Springtime came with a vengeance this year, the river rose high, the water ain't clear," he sings in words composed on the banks of the Cumberland River.

But it isn't until Emily adds harmony on the second verse that the voltage of their voices joined together takes command.

It's possible, maybe even probable, that these gentle songs won't rise to the top of the country charts. But they will find their way onto many a mellow playlist. And if they had emerged under the names of, say, Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, surely Nashville would have dropped to its knees.

The thing is, this isn't the kind of music that's written with stardom in mind. These songs feel like they had to come out.

Ray Davies, "Our Country: Americana Act II" (Sony Legacy)

Like most sequels, Ray Davies' "Our Country: Americana Act II" doesn't live up to the original.

The Kinks co-founder's latest effort is a follow-up to last year's "Americana," a standout record that marked his first solo effort of original material in nearly a decade. But instead of a sequel taking things in a new direction, the 19-track "Americana Act II" feels more like a rehash with material that's not as strong as the original.

Part of the problem is that Davies follows the same format as "Americana": new songs mixed with spoken word excerpts from his 2013 memoir and reinterpretations of old tunes like "Oklahoma U.S.A." from the Kinks' seminal 1971 album, "Muswell Hillbillies."

Where the approach felt fresh on "Americana," this time around it just feels like a retreat.

On both records, Davies explores his journey through America. It's a fascinating story, to be sure, and the American alt-country band from Minnesota, the Jayhawks, once again provide exceptional backing for the distinctly British Davies.

Let's hope the next time Davies is in a less nostalgic mood, just like he sings in the last verse of the last song on "Americana Act II": "Don't do it again."

Jim James, "Uniform Distortion" (ATO Records)

My Morning Jacket frontman Jim James offers his musings on love, life and the hazards of our social media-driven modern world on his fourth solo record, the rocking "Uniform Distortion."

With driving guitar riffs and catchy hooks combined with his signature soaring vocals, James delivers an utterly engaging, hard-charging, straight-ahead record that almost feels like a throwback to a different era while also being very much current.

Or, as he sings on "Out of Time": "I'm either behind the times or ahead of the times or maybe I'm just out of time, out of luck."

It's hard not to get sucked in. Who can't relate to the first single, "Just a Fool," when James sings, "Just a fool getting by/ Just a fool doing all right."

On "Throwback," James mixes nostalgia for a world before we were all connected, whether we like it or not, through our social media accounts.

"Scroll back in time through your account/ Watch your face grow younger as real time runs out/ Throwback Thursday to the way that it was/ When we were young," he sings.

The record's title, "Uniform Distortion," couples perfectly with the cover image taken from a 1971 "Whole Earth Catalog" showing a person hidden behind what appears to be a blinding light. Considered together with the music, it sends the message that all of us, and everything around us, is distorted.

The question James grapples with, and that listeners are left to ponder, is what are we going to do about it?

Also:

NASHVILLE, Tenn: It was only a matter of time, just a couple of months actually, before a pre-teen boy captured in a viral video yodeling in a Walmart put out a record.

Mason Ramsey, the adorable 11-year-old whose version of a Hank Williams classic has been watched more than 50 million times on YouTube and spawned multiple remixes, will put out his first album on July 20.

Titled "Famous," the EP includes a mix of new songs and country classics, including the song that made Mason an overnight Internet sensation, "Lovesick Blues."

Raised in the small town of Golconda, Illinois, Ramsey said his grandfather taught him to sing when he was 3 years old and he started performing at nursing homes, restaurants and fairs. "When I started to sing, I guess you could say it was good for a 3-year-old," Ramsey said in a telephone interview.

But it took him weeks to discover that his impromptu Walmart performance had gone viral because his family didn't have Internet access at their home. They got a call from producers with "The Ellen Show," and he was flown to Los Angeles — his first-ever plane ride — to be a guest on the show. (AP)



This image released by Marvel Studios shows Michael Pena in a scene from 'Ant-Man and the Wasp'. (AP)



Director Rob Reiner attends the premiere of Vertice Entertainment's 'Shock and Awe' at The London West Hollywood on July 9 in West Hollywood, California. (AFP)



Lee



Depp

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Comic book legend Stan Lee has terminated a \$1 billion lawsuit alleging that the entertainment company he co-founded had tricked him into signing away his image rights.

The complaint, filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court in May, accused POW! Entertainment CEO Shane Duffy and co-founder Gill Champion of failing to disclose fully to Lee details of the firm's 2017 sale to Camsing International.

The entertainment icon contended that they took advantage of him at a time when he was dependent over the death of his wife Joan and suffering from macular degeneration, a condition affecting the eyes.

"The whole thing has been confusing to everyone, including myself and the fans, but I am now happy to be surrounded by those who want the best for me," Lee said in statement circulated among US media.

"I am thrilled to put the lawsuit behind me, get back to business with my friends and colleagues at POW! and launch the next wave of amazing characters and stories!" (AFP)

CANBERRA, Australia: Oscar-winning actor Geoffrey Rush has pulled out of Shakespeare stage production in Australia as he sues a Sydney newspaper for defamation.

Melbourne Theatre Company Artistic Director Brett Sheehy said he received confirmation Monday of Rush's withdrawal from the role of Malvolio in a seven-week season of "Twelfth Night" that begins on Nov. 12.

Rush cited his current circumstances and medical advice for having to withdraw. "I do so with the greatest regret. I know that I would not be able to provide the necessary creative spirit and the professional stamina required," Rush said in the statement received by the artistic director.

Sheehy said the company respected Rush's decision and the resulting casting decisions would

Film

Disney launches 'Dream Big Princess' to support female directors

After 'Wasp', is Marvel's future female?

LOS ANGELES, July 10, (RTRS): The 20th installment in the Marvel Cinematic Universe also marked a franchise first.

With "Ant-Man and the Wasp," audiences finally saw a Marvel movie co-headlined by a woman as Evangeline Lilly's Hope Van Dyne (a.k.a. the Wasp) shared center stage with Paul Rudd's Ant-Man. The superhero sequel opened with \$161 million worldwide, \$76 million of which came from North America.

The estrogen injection paid off. While that's a slower start than recent Marvel titles such as "Avengers: Infinity War" and "Black Panther," it's a significant jump on the original film's \$57 million domestic debut. Given that it basically made back its \$175 million price tag in the first three days, "Ant-Man and the Wasp" looks to yet another win for the Disney-owned company.

"We've seen enough guys in Spandex to last a lifetime. It's time to share the wealth," Jeff Bock, an analyst with Exhibitor Relations, said. "Marvel is the hottest thing going. They can't stay static, and they're trying hard to diversify."

Comic books and geek culture have often been male-dominated, but that's changing. Expectations are high for "Captain Marvel," a 2019 film that will feature Oscar-winner Brie Larson as the title character. In a bit of glass-ceiling shattering, "Captain Marvel" will be Marvel's inaugural female-led standalone adventure.

Shortly after "Captain Marvel" bows in March, "Avengers 4" will close out the third chapter in the MCU. Until this year with the release of "Black Panther," the series has stacked up one white leading man after the next. Looking forward, Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige has said Phase 4 (the films following "Avengers: Infinity War Part 2") will be "distinctly different" than the first three chapters. In line with the shrouded secrecy that is the Marvel brand, it's anyone's guess what that ambiguous statement means.

Odds are, Marvel is going to follow suit in Phase 4 with an equal share of sequels and new storylines. That gives the studio a unique chance to push for greater gender and racial diversity when it comes to rounding out the next iterations of Earth's mightiest heroes.

Proved

In the case of female heroes, Marvel is arriving late to the party. It was DC that first proved that audiences of both genders will show up to watch a female hero save the world. Last year's "Wonder Woman" was a global smash that has already inspired a sequel and seen Gal Gadot emerge as one of the biggest stars in the DC firmament. She's outshining Batman and Superman these days.

Prior to "Wonder Woman," the failure of films like Halle Berry's "Catwoman" and Jennifer Garner's "Elektra" made studios wary of greenlighting movies about female heroes. Of course, they failed to recognize that crummy scripts, not sexist audiences, doomed those titles.

"Obviously, there was a stigma attached to female superhero movies. The problem is they weren't badly cast, but they were poor films," Bock said. "It was just a matter of time before the right person in Spandex was able to climb the mountain."

He adds, "Now that ['Wonder Woman' and 'Black Panther']

be made "in due course."

The Australian actor is suing The Daily Telegraph for defamation over articles published in December that accused him of inappropriate behavior toward actress Eryn Jean Norvill during the Sydney Theatre Company's production of "King Lear" in

2015. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: A film crew member says in a lawsuit that Johnny Depp twice punched him on the Los Angeles set of a movie about the killing of Notorious B.I.G., and that he was fired from the production

when he refused to promise not to sue over the incident.

Location manager Greg "Rocky" Brooks is also suing the film's director and producers for unspecified damages in the lawsuit filed Friday in Los Angeles County Superior Court.

In the movie, "City of Lies,"

set for US release Sept. 7, the 55-year-old Depp plays a Los Angeles police detective who for years investigated the still-unsolved 1997 death of the rapper Notorious B.I.G., also known as Biggie Smalls, whose real name is Christopher Wallace.

Brooks alleges that in April 2017, when the film was shooting under the title "Labyrinth" in and around the Barclay Hotel in downtown L.A., he informed the director Brad Furman that an upcoming take featuring Depp would have to be the last outdoor shot of the night because of legal permits. (AP)

MONTREUX, Switzerland: An all-star cast of musicians from Ibrahim Maalouf to Mos Def, Robert Glasper and Monty Alexander celebrated producer Quincy Jones at an epic Montreux concert that ended just before dawn on Monday.

Jones, who turned 85 in March, attended the birthday tribute in the House of Jazz at the 52nd edition of the Montreux Jazz Festival, where he served as co-director in the 1990s.

Drummer Nate Smith and Kinfolk opened the three-hour show at 02:00 am with "Skip Step", later joined by Richard Bona on bass. (RTRS)

Drake shatters global records

LOS ANGELES, July 10, (RTRS): Canadian rapper Drake shattered records with his new album "Scorpion," which became the first to score one billion streams in its first week and also debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 album charts.

Drake's record company, Republic Records, said the 31-year-old musician, who was the biggest seller in 2016, was the first artist to reach one billion plus streams globally across all platforms in one week of release. The previous record of almost 700 million streams was set in May by Post Malone's "beerbongs & bentleys."



French-Lebanese trumpet player, composer and arranger Ibrahim Maalouf performs during a jam session during the Quincy Jones 85th birthday celebration at the 'Montreux Jazz Club' during the 52nd Montreux Jazz Festival in Montreux, Switzerland, on July 9. The event running from June 29 to July 14 will feature 380 concerts. (AP)