

## Sarah Jarosz



## Build Me Up from Bones

Recorded during Sarah Jarosz's final semester at the New England Conservatory,

*Build Me Up from Bones* is the perfect graduation present, breaking new ground as her chops, smarts, and confidence continue to grow. You can hear it in the opening track "Over the Edge," with Jarosz's octave mandolin supplying the bassline while Dan Dugmore's lap steel provides the drama; in "Anything Else," where her guitar fits effortlessly alongside Nathaniel Smith's cello and Alex Hargreaves's violin; and in "Fuel the Fire," where she trades clawhammer banjo licks with mandolinist Chris Thile, who has long supported her journey from prodigy to pro. The two covers, Joanna Newsom's "The Book of Right-On" and Bob Dylan's "Simple Twist of Fate," are equally telling, nudging her voice toward new, greater challenges, while a handful of co-writes with Alyssa Bonagura, Jedd Hughes, and Darrell Scott push her lyrically, emotionally, and melodically. "Let fulfillment fuel the fire / Hide the emptiness inside," she sings, summing up her mission to keep reaching deeper, searching for her unique, mature voice with the understanding that *Build Me Up from Bones* is only the latest chapter in an ongoing, expanding story of exploration. (Sugar Hill)

—KENNY BERKOWITZ

## Acoustic Guitar Summit



## O, Christmas Three

This festive offering is as rich and heady as a rum-spiked eggnog laced with varied spices. There are tradition-

als, such as the stunning "O Holy Night," blues-and-swing variations of such holiday favorites as "Boogie Woogie Jingle Bells," and arresting originals. The Acoustic Guitar Summit is a trio of venerable fingerstyle guitarists—Mark Hanson, Terry Robb, and Doug Smith—each of whom has a solo career, as well as a long history of other projects. The three play together as if they were born to—the tones of their guitars blending beautifully (Hanson and Smith both play Goodall cutaways and Robb plays a Martin 000-28 and 1950 National steel-body guitar, and it is only when they take solo breaks, as on "Blue Christmas," that it's easy to differentiate among them. Arrangements are subtle and sophisticated, with the musicians playing complementary melody and harmony parts as in a chamber group. The gorgeous "Carol of the Bells" evokes the chiming sounds of church

bells against rumbling arpeggios, while "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" toggles between folk-and-classical treatments. The pieces are all standouts, but perhaps the most unusual are Robb originals "Christmas in Istanbul," with its Middle-Eastern, Latin, and swing elements, and "Lowdown Christmas," which drips with bluesy holiday angst. Christmas albums often wear out their welcome quickly. This masterful album, which glows with all the jeweled tones of the season, is not just for the holidays but for any day of the year. (Accent on Music)

—CÉLINE KEATING

## Elephant Revival



## These Changing Skies

It's not an easy feat for a band to take original songs written by multiple members and weave them into a coherent, flowing, and catchy album, but that's just what this Nederland, Colorado, quintet has done on *These Changing Skies*, Elephant Revival's fourth release. Lead vocal work rotates among Bonnie Paige (washboard, percussion), Daniel Rodriguez (guitar, banjo), Sage Cook (guitar, banjo, mandolin), and Dango Rose (bass, mandolin) on the album's ten songs, with the members' deft accompaniment providing the common aural thread throughout. Bridget Law's fiddling is stellar, highlighting and punctuating the band's spacious arrangements. The lead-off track, Rodriguez's "Birds and Stars," sets the tone for the album with an atmospheric bed of guitar, bass, banjo, and fiddle slowly building in intensity, propelled forward by subtle claps, foot stomps, and Paine's washboard. Other standout tracks include "Remembering a Beginning," with Law's fiddle evoking Eastern Mediterranean and Gypsy themes, weaving around Paine's beautifully quavering vocals; Cook's poignant "Over Over And," written in the aftermath of the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School; festival-favorite-in-the-making "Grace of a Woman," Rodriguez's celebration of the feminine, including an "oh, oh, oh" refrain that is impossible to resist singing along with. "The Pasture," one of two instrumentals on the album, features Rose on mandolin, doubling and harmonizing with Law's fiddle, and showing that Elephant Revival has a lot to say even when they aren't singing well-crafted, socially-conscious songs. (Thirty Tigers/ITZ Evolving)

—DAN GABEL

## Tim Easton



## Not Cool

Scoping out the scene after his move to Nashville, Tim Easton walked into Robert's Western World, listened to a

set by JD Simo and Slick Joe Fick, and decided he'd found his new band. It was an inspired choice. Simo, who started as a blues phenom, has grown into a stunningly versatile lead guitarist, and Fick, who portrayed Bill Black in the biopic *Walk the Line*, is as fine a slap bassist as you'll ever hear. Without sounding retro, they give *Not Cool* a sense of style deeply rooted in Memphis rockabilly and surprisingly suited to Easton's strengths as a scrappy, hard-picking acoustic guitarist with a knack for writing good songs about bad times. *Not Cool* opens with betrayal ("Don't Lie"), followed by restlessness ("Lickety Split"), abandonment ("Tired and Hungry"), addiction ("Four Queens"), disappointment ("Not Cool"), and a barking dog in the house next door ("Gallatin Pike Blues"). Finally, "Knock Out Roses (for Levon)," a sunset mandolin-and-fiddle waltz, resolves all these troubled times, closing the album on a high note, with the promise of more bittersweetness the next day. (Campfire Propaganda/Thirty Tigers)

—K.B.

## Guitalian Quartet



## Contemporary Italian Music for Guitar Quartet

The Guitalian Quartet, comprising distinguished Italian classical guitarists Guido Fichtner, Claudio Marcotulli, Maurizio Norrito, and Stefano Palamidessi, was formed in 2006 as an aside from the members' careers as soloists. The quartet's latest recording spotlights music from six Italian composers. While all the works are in a modern idiom, they cover a spectrum ranging from tonal to abstract. Of note is Mauro Schiavone's lovely "Quartetto No. 5," a minimalist piece that opens with lush harmonies, shifting textures, and odd meters en route to a slower, melodic, and less intense middle section. Material from the opening returns before the piece ends on an ambiguous, but strangely satisfying chord. Nicola Jappelli's "Katastroph Polka" shows a sense of humor in juxtaposing quotes from Mozart's "Turkish March," Italian folk songs, a Soviet hymn, Brazilian elements, and biting dissonances. Giovanni Sollima's five-part suite "Bestiario di Leonardo" offers musical portraits of a quintet of fanciful animals found in Leonardo da Vinci's writings. The movements range from highly melodic to purely rhythmic with the third getting a bit funky. Bruno Maderna's 13-minute "Serenata per un Satellite" is the album's most abstract work, alternating strictly notated and aleatoric sections. Throughout the album, the quartet displays virtuosity and tremendous musical rapport. Fans of modern guitar music will not be disappointed. (Bridge)

—MARK SMALL