

pervasive tone of the album but it never gets gloomy. Jolie is blessed with a terrific edgy voice that is strong yet vulnerable at the same time and fits her songs like a black velvet glove.

The arrangements are like a smoky campfire. *Mexico City* has ringing whimsical guitar riffs and horns that give her melancholy tale of Jack Kerouac a colourful touch. And besides the airy musical tastiness, there is solid protein in the lyrics and her stories. *Palmyra*, a song of lost love, begins beautifully with: "Only a few old petals left from the rose that touched your hand/My little heart is a graveyard, it's no man's land".

That's good writin', girl. The whole album is terrific and ends with a melancholy yet tongue-in-cheek, smile-inducing, version of *Enjoy Yourself - it's later than you think*. With guest appearances from M. Ward of My Morning Jacket and Marc Ribot, who played with Elvis Costello and Tom Waits, *The Living and the Dead* is Jolie Holland's best yet.

— by les siemieniuk

J.R. Shore

An Impeccable Shine (Independent)

Every once in awhile an album comes out of the woodwork and totally grabs me, and J.R. Shore has grabbed me with an iron grip.

I must have played Shore's brilliant debut disc half a dozen times since it came into my possession, and it keeps getting better. If this Calgarian doesn't rise out of obscurity this Edmonton boy will start cheering for the Flames.

With barrelhouse piano, a voice that has elements of Randy Newman, Tom Waits, Gram Parsons and even a little Stephen Foster, his songs travel

from New Orleans to Cowtown and all points in between, with beautiful backup including a generous dollop of Dixieland. "Every note of every song can cure you of a world gone wrong," to quote the man himself.

Shore spent a couple of years in Nashville to hone his song-writing skills, and it worked. He sure knows how to tell a story and develop characters in three or four minutes, with gems of lines like "it's cold enough in Cowtown to turn goin' into gone."

I'll keep coming back to this one for a long time.

— By Mike Sadava

Marv Machura

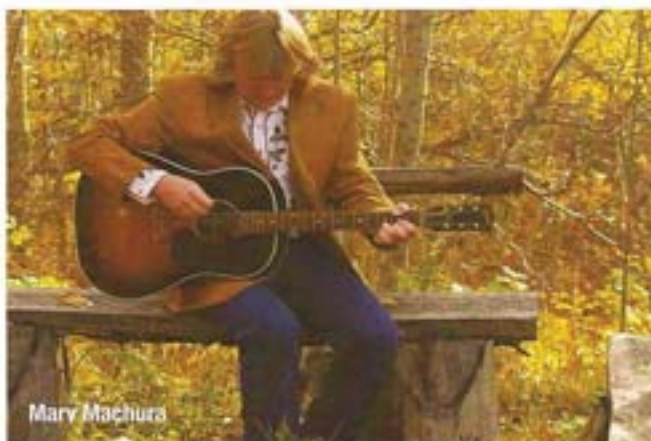
Warm Summer Night (Red Poppy Productions)

Marv Machura is as Alberta as wheat fields, grain elevators or grassy sloughs. His third disc, while steeped in the imagery of the badlands, blizzards, Cree forests, Buffalo skinnners, range riding and other familiar western imagery, is sound and production-wise firmly situated in California light rock from the mid-'70s.

He's a talented guitar player and decent singer (oddly, on this disc his vocals remind me of Stan Ridgway but without



J.R. Shore



Mary Machura

the tongue-in-cheek irony) but he's so sincere and pop-rock that he comes off as somebody's overly earnest, well-meaning dad rather than a folk rocker. In *She's Gone* there's also a hint of the overwrought dead-girls-in-cars ballad singers of the 1950s. Maybe he's just taking the John Denver comparisons too far. Don't write him off, though, because he's one of those guys who's so unhip he might become hip again when he hits a certain age, like Hank Snow or Stompin' Tom Connors in their day.

— By Barry Hammond

McCalmans

McCalmans Live: Coming Home (Three Six Records)

McCalmans started perform-

ing in 1964 and are one of Scotland's best-loved and most enduring folk groups. Currently, they are Ian McCalman, Nick Keir and Stephen Quigg. This CD was recorded in Scotland and Denmark. They have an old-fashioned feel to their music, which evokes memories of the folk revival from which they emerged. Their sound is clean and pleasant with the emphasis on melodic singing and close harmonies. At times they stray into hokey territory such as the somewhat irksome *Let's Recycle*. They offer their reading of the traditional *Ye Jacobites* and *Only Remembered* and Stan Rogers's *Northwest Passage*. The rest is mostly original tunes, with the writing of Ian McCalman being most heavily featured. It is all a bit too conservative and clean cut for my taste.

— By Tim Readman

Jason Fowler

Buckets of Rain (Independent)

If you don't know Jason Fowler, you should. A supremely talented singer-songwriter, he's made MVP status from lending his guitar-playing talents to more acts than can be listed here as well as being an accompanist to John McDermott and others. An intermittent solo career at best, Fowler's talents