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Superior songwriters form supergroup

July 22, 2010

BY ROBERT REID, RECORD STAFF

Lynn Jackson

Coming Down (Busted Flat Records)

Before the panic sets in, let's set the record straight.

Kitchener roots artist Lynn Jackson hasn't abandoned her patented blend of folk and country balladry.

Nonetheless, *Coming Down*, her fifth Busted Flat release since 2004, ventures more deeply into pop — with forays into reggae, funk, blues, Klezmer and jazz — than previous releases.

Produced by Jackson along with Chris Boyne and Ian Smith, who both play on the album, *Coming Down* features guest musicians Andy Miller, Chris (Junior) Malleck, Arun Paul, Dan Walsh, Steve Wood and Paul MacLeod, who co-wrote *When You Were Mine*.

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Stephanie Bell/Emerging Design & Photography

Lynn Jackson's latest album veers from her usual sound and ...

Although songwriting remains the focus, the album is Jackson's most sonically eclectic to date, which gives rise to the question of where she is headed next. For now, enjoy the ride and stay tuned.

Eliza Gilkyson, John Gorka, Lucy Kaplansky

Red Horse (Red House)

Eliza Gilkyson, John Gorka and Lucy Kaplansky are three of America's very best contemporary singer/songwriters and they all happen to be Red House labelmates.

Although they are longtime friends, have made guest appearances on each other's albums and sometimes shared a stage, *Red Horse* is their first collaborative album. And it's terrific.

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All but three of the album's 12 tracks are written or co-written by the featured artists, with the exception of Neil Young's *I am a Child*, Stuart McGregor's *Coshieville* and the traditional ballad *Wayfaring Stranger*.

Gilkyson, Gorka and Kaplansky are all excellent songwriters with strong voices. The surprise is not the strength of the material nor the authority of the lead vocals, but how good they sound in two- and three-part harmony. It's fascinating to here how they interpret each other's songs.

A number of guest musicians, including guitarist Duke Levine and Cisco Ryder on percussion and Mark Hallman on bass, provide a note-perfect acoustic backdrop.

Supergroup is an abused term these days, but there is no more accurate description for these three folk compadres.

Ruth Moody

The Garden (Red House)

Like a flower that grows from seed to blossom, *The Garden* blooms in acoustic splendour.

The album is the debut solo release from Ruth Moody, a member of the ever-popular Wailin' Jennys, and it's an ear-tingling delight.

Moody wrote or co-wrote all 12 tracks and she plays acoustic guitar, banjo, piano, ukulele and accordion, which are lovely vehicles to carry her soft, sweet, plaintive vocals. Those vocals receive sensitive treatment from producer David Travers-Smith. However, she gets a helping hand from a gifted gathering of guest artists including Elora's Kevin Breit, Colin Cripps, Luke Doucet, Joey Wright, Greg Liszt and Oh Susanna, among others

Kim Beggs

Blue Bones (Black Hen Music)

It was only a matter of time before Yukon singer/songwriter Kim Beggs connected with Vancouver wunderkind producer Steve Dawson.

The result is *Blue Bones*, and what a happy meeting it is.

Beggs writes plaintive and bittersweet story songs out of the folk and old-time country traditions, with a decidedly northern bent. And she sings with an unadorned honesty that teeters on the verge of heartbreak.

As usual, Dawson doesn't impose or get in the way as producer. Instead, he assembles a group of sympathetic musicians who bring out Beggs's strengths, with the addition of a couple of roots ringers from south of the border in Laurie Lewis and Gurf Morlix.

In addition to nine originals, Beggs offers readings of Bob Dylan's *I'll Be Your Baby Tonight*, Patty Griffin's *Trapeze* and Jack Clement's *Just Someone I Used to Know*, in addition to the traditional *I'm Thinking of My Blue Eyes*.

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