

Boston Globe
Scott Alarik's top CD picks of 2008
December 14, 2008

KATHY MATTEA, "Coal" (Captain Potato) The country-folk hit maker folds a fierce populist message into a tenderly observed homage to her West Virginia roots. Her gorgeous, gritty vocals prove that country music still benefits from a little honest dirt under its nails.

THE DUHKS, "Fast Paced World" (Sugar Hill) Canada's premier neo-tradsters romp from world-beat to blues, urban-pop to old-timey, with wild-eyed invention, haunting traditionalism, and spine-rattling groove. Who says the Frozen North can't sizzle, eh?

PETE SEEGER, "At 89" (Appleseed) It almost feels like the old folk lion is scouring his vast musical pantry, making sure that every scrap of useful music is given away. A compellingly personal peek into Seeger's resplendent and radical genius.

LISSA SCHNECKENBURGER, "Song" (Footprint) New England's long-obscured canon of native-born traditional songs is brought to gorgeous, toe-tapping life by the brilliant Down East fiddler-singer. How can something so culturally significant be this much fun?

VARIOUS "The Imagined Village" (Real World) Electrifying reinventions of British folk classics by an intriguing, divergent cast, including Billy Bragg, Martin and Eliza Carthy, Simon Emmerson, Tunng, Sheila Chandra, and Benjamin Zephaniah.

ROSALIE SORRELS, "Strangers in Another Country" (Red House) Raw, tender, wise, and wounded, Sorrels creates an intimate musical wake for songwriter-raconteur Utah Phillips, whose legend she did so much to create.

MALINKY, "Flower & Iron" (Mad River) This young Scottish quintet may be the best ballad band in the Celtic realm. Their sound is as primal as Highland moors in March, as seductive as a first kiss.

VARIOUS "Red House 25" (Red House) The superbly realized retrospective tracks the modern songwriter movement from Greg Brown's Grant Wood naturalism and John Gorka's romantic realism

to Meg Hutchinson's intimate impressionism and the primitive neo-trad landscapes of the Pines.

TONY RICE, "Night Flyer: The Singer-Songwriter Collection" (Rounder) The bluegrass guitar god's earthy, spacious, and propulsive vocal style is finally given its due. Find out why this old picker is Alison Krauss's favorite singer.

JONATHA BROOKE, "The Works" (Bad Dog) Woody Guthrie's lyrics find an urbane new voice within Brooke's sleek, winking alt-pop. If the Dust Bowl troubadour had matriculated at Amherst, he'd sound just like this.

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