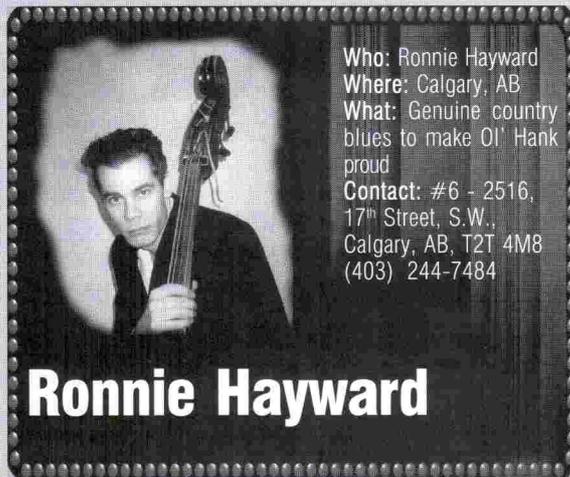


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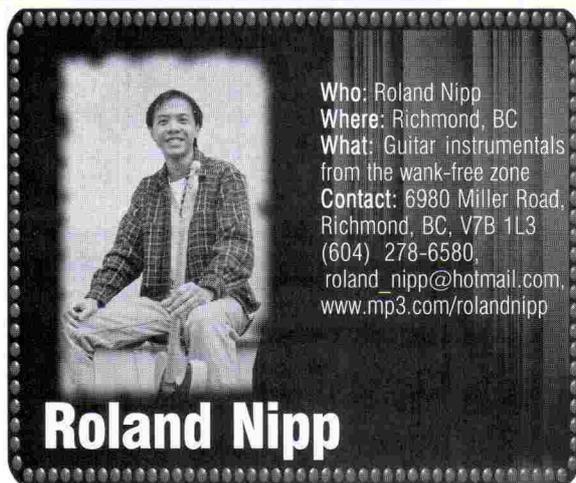
by Jim Kelly

Everyone knows that there's only one place to go to make a country-blues record: Holland. Well, maybe that's not everyone's first choice, but for Calgary-based roots musician Ronnie Hayward, it just kinda worked out that way. A familiar face on the Canadian roots music scene, Ronnie has toured North America and Europe with his group, The Ronnie Hayward Trio. On a trip to Amsterdam a while back, Ronnie was having trouble rounding up his band before their scheduled gig, so a group of local musicians offered to help out. The show went so well that they got together afterward to lay down some tracks, and the result is Hayward's sixth album, *The Lost Utrecht Sessions*, which captures the sound and feel of a long-lost collection of country-blues standards from the '50s. When you hear the steel guitar at the beginning of "Crazy Me", you'd swear you've somehow fallen into an old Hank Williams side. "I kinda had an idea of how I wanted the songs to sound," Hayward says, "but I let those guys have a pretty free reign with it because I knew that they understood the style." The fact that it was all recorded live, straight onto 1/2" tape with no overdubs, undoubtedly accounts for a lot of the album's warmth. That, and the rootsy sound of mandolin, dobro, acoustic guitar, Hayward's upright bass and his straight-up, no-nonsense singing. So if you're in the mood for some roots-rockin' country blues done the way it oughta be, take Ronnie Hayward's advice ... and go Dutch.



Who: Ronnie Hayward
Where: Calgary, AB
What: Genuine country blues to make Ol' Hank proud
Contact: #6 - 2516, 17th Street, S.W., Calgary, AB, T2T 4M8 (403) 244-7484

Ronnie Hayward



Who: Roland Nipp
Where: Richmond, BC
What: Guitar instrumentals from the wank-free zone
Contact: 6980 Miller Road, Richmond, BC, V7B 1L3 (604) 278-6580, roland_nipp@hotmail.com, www.mp3.com/rolandnipp

Roland Nipp

Roland Nipp is so dedicated to his guitar that he's given it its own room in his Richmond, BC home. The Blue Room is Nipp's home studio where he spent the past two-and-a-half years writing and recording the album that bears the same name. It's his first solo instrumental CD, and the guitarist plays all the instruments himself, including bass and drums. Having been in Top 40 bands, original music bands, and done some session work, Nipp decided to take a break from all that in order to try to find his own style and develop his own sound. By the sound of things, he's on the right track. What's great about the CD is that many of the cuts have the sound of unadorned purity. Though Nipp dirties up the sound with the odd bit of distortion here and there, you never lose the feeling that the sounds are produced by the fingers of a real person. He plays with clarity and economy, giving the notes and melodies space to breathe. "I guess my tastes have leaned more towards pure-sounding guitars in the past few years," Nipp says. "I like space. There's nothing like just hearing the notes." From the bluesy "Nocturnal Travels" to the jazzy "Eight Above", the acoustic grace of "Father's Day" and the harmonica-accompanied folk of "Crossings", Nipp puts the song first, never letting technique supersede taste. If you thought instrumental music was only for elevators, *The Blue Room* will show you another level.

Toronto-based singer-songwriter Alex Baird released her first full-length CD, titled *ish*, this past October. Listening to the album, it's apparent that the title was no mere whim. The album is pop-*ish*, it's rock-*ish*, it's folk-*ish*... you get the idea. It borders on a lot of different genres, mining some of the best elements from each. Strummed acoustic guitars frame wistful melodies, while tasteful layers of synth and contemporary rhythms provide a comfortable but not overpowering texture. Baird's taffy-sweet voice sails you through the verses and brings you home with choruses of richly layered harmonies. Produced with Iain McNally (Catherine Durand, Sara Slean), it's often the small touches that make the songs special. The lead-off track and first single, "Tell Me", is an infectious slice of breezy, acoustic pop, but its charm is secured by the wonderfully dated Moog-ish melody that floats in from time to time. And there's no denying the catchy chorus from "Insomnia", nor the chiming guitars on "Anytime". For Baird, it's all about how the music makes you feel. "My favourite thing is not the technical craft of the song or how complex I can make it," she says, "but does it hit the person on a visceral level - that sort of subconscious thing. I want the melody to stick in their head and have them feel the music more than anything." Check out this wonderful debut from a very promising artist, and start feeling *ish-ish*.



Who: Alex Baird
Where: Toronto, Ontario
What: Genre-bending singer-songwriter
Contact: Alexbaird@hotmail.com, or Marty Menard, Hunt the Sandman Inc., (416) 407-4169; Promotions/Publicity: Last Tango Productions (Yvonne Valnea), (416) 538-1838, lasttango@pathcom.com, www.alexbaird.com

Alex Baird

If you are unsigned and would like to be a part of **Showcase**, send us a complete bio, glossy black & white photo (no computer print-outs or scans) and a cassette/CD of your music. Also include an address and phone number where you can be reached. Send your complete package to: **Showcase**, *Canadian Musician*, 23 Hannover Dr., #7, St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A3.

Showcase also appears on the *Canadian Musician* Web site at www.canadianmusician.com.

Jim Kelly is a Toronto-based freelance writer.

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