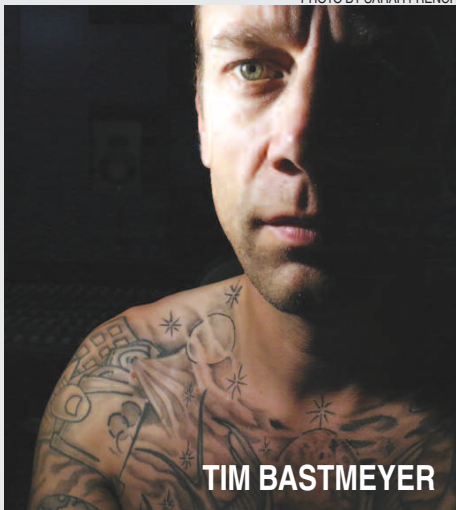


PHOTO BY SARAH FRENCH



TIM BASTMEYER

PHOTO BY SARAH FRENCH



CORKY SIEGEL'S CHAMBER BLUES

PHOTO COURTESY OF COURTESY KL PROD.



## Prog-Blues, Fusion, *Fractured Pop*, A *Speechless* Champian, Forlorn Strangers, Matters Of State & Love For Amy

They had one whale of a big-time party north of the border when **Tim Bastmeyer's** *All-Star Blues Band* recorded this nine-track all-original self-titled gem (Grassfire Entertainment). You can tell because the players—all known entities in the thriving and eclectic Canadian blues scene—solo madly, especially on the one jazzy instrumental, “Funky Ten.” Opening with the Johnny Cash-inspired “What That Woman Does To Me,” composer/guitarist Bastmeyer proves to be an engaging vocalist comfortable in numerous styles. “Northern Boogie Blues” throws out a 7/8-timed curveball giving the track just a hint of prog-blues experimentation. Amid the party atmosphere, though, the twin highlights have to be his blues of fighting depression (“It’s A Shame”) and closer “Rough Night At The Office,” which wouldn’t be out-of-place on a Tom Waits album.

*Different Voices: Blues Harmonica and Classical String Quartet* (Dawnserly Records) by **Corky Siegel's Chamber Blues** is one of the most unique and satisfying fusion CDs of the new millennium. As one Minnesota critic put it, Corky has “married Muddy Waters and Mozart.” Plus, the guests are splendiferous. Opener “Missing Persons Blues Opus #26” features rock ‘n’ roll saxophonist Ernie Watts (ask the Stones about him). The “Time Will Tell Overture” features Indian tabla master Sandeep Das. Marcella Detroit sings the song she wrote with Eric Clapton (“Lay Down Sally”). They meld the 1955 Big Joe Turner hit “Flip Flop & Fly” with an “Italian Shuffle.” There’s even a hip-hop-styled beat-box moment with Matthew Santos whose work with Lupe Fiasco garnered him a Grammy nom. The sky’s the limit on this free-form craziness that works in spades.

“Fractured Pop” (Fleur de Son), a CD/DVD by the **Jentsch Group Quartet** (their fifth) features Brooklyn guitarist/composer Chris Jentsch playing distorted electric guitar in playful tag with multi-instrumentalist Matt Renzi. Oftentimes Jentsch will opt for some sublime acoustic

finger-picking while Renzi—proficient on tenor saxophone, clarinet and alto flute—darts this way and that way, under, over, sideways and through. Bassist Jim Whitney is spider-like in his runs, obviously influenced by Ron Carter (who isn’t?). Their answer song to “Bye Bye Blackbird” is “Are You Bye,” sweetened by drummer John Mettam’s brush-work. The DVD has them performing a short set plus alternate rehearsal takes and self-produced video.

For her eighth CD, Oklahoma singer/songwriter/pianist **Champion Fulton** is *Speechless* (Posi-Tone Records), in other words, no vocals. That’s fine because her piano-playing is world-class, her trio—with bassist Adi Meyerson and drummer Ben Zweig—sublime. The sole cover is Leo Wood’s 1918 “Somebody Stole My Gal,” a vibrant tune that has certainly stood the test of time. Recorded by dozens of great artists including Cab Calloway (1931), Fats Waller (1935), Count Basie (1940) and Jim Kweskin’s Jug Band (1965), the original Ted Weems version was the #1 song in America for five straight weeks in 1923. Fulton likes her “Tea and Tangerines” (a clever mash-up of “Tea For Two” from the 1925 movie *No No Nanette* and Johnny Mercer’s 1941 “Tangerine”), yet is quick to warn, “That’s Not Your Donut” (a 12-bar blues). Hers is a joyful presence that lends itself to repeated listening. She gets romantic (“Day’s End”), and, more importantly, shows a healthy respect for her forebears in her compositions like “Lullaby For Art” (Blakey), “Dark Blue” (Woody Herman), “Later Gator” (Lou Donaldson), “Happy Camper” (Horace Silver) and “Carondeleto’s” (Clark Terry).

The five outstanding singer/songwriters who make up **Forlorn Strangers** give this Nashville collective a leg up on most other Americana acts. No drums, but jam-band propensities abound. Their collective sensibilities crash into one another to make a gleeful noise. The two sisters harmonize like angels. One sister comes complete

with multi-instrumentalist husband. Then there’s not-so-secret weapon Jesse Thompson, a whiz on strings, whose originals tend toward swamp-rock glory while his bandmates go for that easy peaceful feeling of Southern Cali. It all amounts to a hell of a good time in concert as their Easton, PA gig at The Acopian Ballroom (upstairs at the State Theatre) proved. See this band at all costs. They’re that good.

The news emanating from the stage at the State Theatre proper (downstairs) is that longtime Dylan and Levon Helm sideman Larry Campbell jammed out with **Rosanne Cash**’s band. It was a two-set extravaganza with set #1 being her brilliant *The River & The Thread* in its entirety and the second set being a greatest-hits party. A thousand hails to the State for booking Cash in the first place, and having the kind of sterling sound where you could actually hear every single word she sang in her thick honeyed instrument of a voice. Her husband/lead guitarist/producer/co-songwriter John Leventhal was clearly knocked out by having string-master Campbell on hand and the two almost transcended this delectable Americana event into Allman Brothers territory, deliciously stretching each song out. Toto hits this stage June 16 as does the traveling roadshow of “Mamma Mia” July 12/13.

When singer/songwriter **Amy Fairchild** released her impressive 2014 self-titled debut, it was so good that I fell in love with her immediately. *Nobody’s Satellite* is even better. Her longtime band backs her up on these 11 songs that span the gamut from confessional odes and alt-country to roots-rock and piano ballads. Fairchild is one of those supremely talented artists who had to raise \$20K in a 30-day Kickstarter campaign to fund this release. Twenty years in, she’s just reaching her near-brilliant stride. Highlights include “Save Myself Tonight,” “When I Was Six And You Were Four” and the closing “Favorite Chair.” I’m still in love.

### CHAMPION FULTON



PHOTO BY ANNA YATSEVICH

### FORLORN STRANGERS



PHOTO BY JENNIFER ELROD

