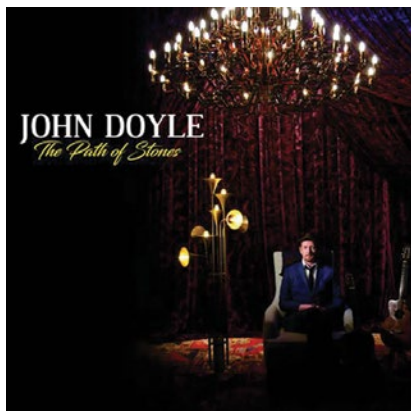


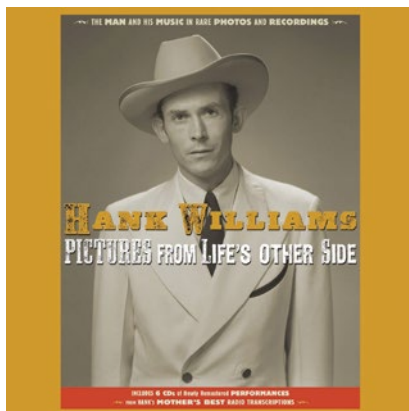


MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

John Doyle: *The Path of Stones*. Compass.

If you are a fan of modern Celtic music, you're probably aware of John Doyle. He first came to my attention in the early 1990s when I saw him playing with the Irish super-group Solas on the Public Radio Show, E-Town, which was produced in my hometown at the time, Boulder, Colorado. Since then, Doyle has gone on to amass an impressive list of accomplishments, including a Grammy nomination in 2010. He also served as the band leader for the Joan Baez band. Currently Doyle plays with John McCusker and Michael McGoldrick in the Celtic band Usher's Island. On his third solo album, *The Path of Stones*, Doyle continues to explore his Celtic roots. The album showcases not only Doyle's virtuosic DADGAD-tuned guitar playing, but also his singing. Doyle's guitar playing has always been impressive, with a powerful right-hand technique, but his singing here has equal impact. The album was recorded in Ireland and Asheville, North Carolina, and the studio sound is intimate without additional or artificial room ambience added in mastering. I like the isolation and specificity of the imaging, which will easily produce a feeling of Doyle being in the room with you. **Steven Stone**

Further Listening: Solas: *Reunion: A Decade of Solas*; Kate Rusby: *The Girl Who Couldn't Fly*

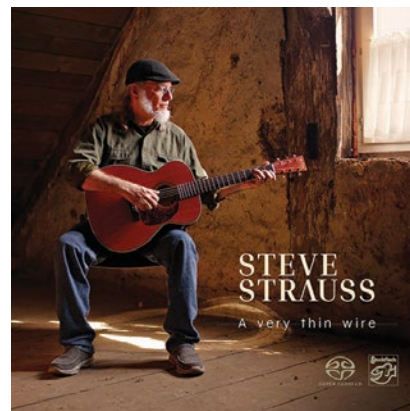


MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Hank Williams: *Pictures from Life's Other Side*. BMG (6 CDs).

In 1951 Hank Williams signed on to do a 15-minute radio show sponsored by Mother's Best Flower. He and his combo sang gospel and country songs; other musicians would perform, too, and they'd all contribute some relaxed banter. Ultimately, 72 shows were pre-recorded, and those acetates miraculously survived. Time-Life issued every last second of them in 2011, but the sound lacked any bottom end and was about as pleasant as a dentist's drill. Enter this new set with six CDs and a deluxe 272-page hardcover book with scads of pictures—some never before seen, and even a few in color. The discs collect only the performances Hank himself appeared in, along with little bits of the banter (often faded out too quickly, my sole complaint). In addition to the expected hits, there are rarities and obscurities like "On Top of Old Smoky" and "From Jerusalem to Jericho" that Hank never recorded elsewhere. The sound is rich and punchy mono, superior to Time-Life's and to most of Mercury's ten-disc *Complete Hank Williams*. The best part? Hearing Hank as a living, breathing, laughing human rather than just a mythologized, oversized broken heart. **Stephen Estep**

Further Listening: Moon Mullican: *The Very Best of Moon Mullican* (Master Classics)



MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Steve Strauss: *A Very Thin Wire*. Stockfish.

Are you in the mood for folk music where everything blends together nicely, with dobro, dobro, lap steel guitar, fretless electric bass, acoustic guitars, and other instruments framing the vocals of an experienced singer-songwriter on performances captured in warm, intimate sound? If so, that describes in a nutshell the latest release by Steven Strauss, who recorded his debut album on Stockfish over 20 years ago and still seems well-suited for the audiophile folk label from Germany. Strauss plays electric music with a group called Monkeys Typing and sometimes delves into the blues, but as a folksy he's a true natural, reminding me at times of John Sebastian both vocally and lyrically, with a similar sense of whimsy. Strauss comes across as less of a "sensitive singer-songwriter" than an everyman who experiences the same ups and downs as we do; in other words, you can relate to his songs. At times his voice borders on raspy, which serves him well on Tom Waits' "(Looking for) The Heart of Saturday Night." The other cover, Scott Boyer's "Please Be with Me," was a highlight on Clapton's *461 Ocean Boulevard*; much to his credit, Strauss also does a fine job of capturing the depth and beauty of that song. **Jeff Wilson**

Further Listening: Alan Taylor: *All is One*; Chris Jones: *Roadhouses & Automobiles*