

EAR CANDY

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Ike Reilly

Hard Luck Stories

Ike Reilly's got something to say, and dammit, you're gonna listen — just like his audiences have been for over a decade. Reilly's been developing, branding, re-developing and re-branding his raspy-voiced storytelling for some time now, and he's back with *Hard Luck Stories*, a 10 song collection of whiskey, women and wine (whine, maybe) that follows the logical progression of this genre-bending journeyman, sampling the good (and sometimes bad) sides of everything from lazy lounge pop to grungy R&B and furious acoustic punk.

Reilly comes out of the gate swinging with *Stories* opener "Morning Glory" getting right to the point. Musically, we get the laid-back grooves that will become Reilly's calling card for the next 43 minutes. The upward trajectory of the opening tunes carries Reilly strongly into the terminally catchy pop number "Girls In The Backroom," probably the strongest track on the record (complete with a guest appearance by Cracker's Johnny Hickman). But as "Girls" fades away, and just as we're getting comfortable, it becomes evident that *Stories* has three definite phases: the good, the painfully mundane and the good 2.0, which follow respectively from start (tracks 1-3), to middle (4-6) to end (7-10). "The War On The Terror And On The Drugs" should be the album's heavy hitter, featuring Reilly's kindred spirit (and Waylon's kin) in Shooter Jennings, swapping acoustic tidbits over a heavy blues groove. But Shooter sets the tone from the outset, asking Reilly jokingly, "What's this song about, anyway?" And he nails it. "War" never finds a center of gravity and comes off as nothing more than a four minute meander with a big-time contributor.

Hard Luck Stories is a good collection. Above average, not great, but plenty good. Like one would suppose a good story should be, *Stories* twists and turns, pushes and pulls, excites and bores — but never allows the listener out of the storyteller's shoes. An overall victory for a songwriter not accustomed to much less.

[Alec Wooden]