

REVIEWS

PISTOL ANNIES

**Annie Up**

[Sony Nashville]

When it comes to Pistol Annies—Miranda Lambert, Angaleena Presley and Ashley Monroe—the whole is often greater than the sum of its parts. On its second album, the country trio pays tribute to lower-class women and speaks intelligently of their struggles. Whether singing alone or in harmony, each Annie adds new wrinkles to her phrasing: Lambert sounds feistier than ever, and Presley and Monroe meet that challenge with terrifically tart performances of their own. Throughout, the ladies sing atop country-rock arrangements accented by steel guitar and Dobro. Finger-snapping opener “I Feel a Sin Comin’ On” sets the unrighteous tone, and “Damn Thing,” a banjo-juiced hoedown, is a tempting advertisement for avoiding the straight and narrow. The Annies do just that on “Unhappily Married,” riding a jittery acoustic guitar riff toward divorce court. Domestic unrest remains their bread and butter, but a few romantic ballads give balance after the obligatory bad-girl anthems. —Blake Boldt

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