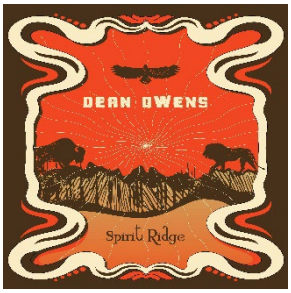

Dean Owens – Spirit Ridge

Press coverage

FEATURES

The Herald
https://www.heraldscotland.com/life_style/24934555.i-think-quite-spiritual-record-dean-owens-italian-job/
See end pages for clipping)

Americana UK
Interview with Dean and Don Antonio
https://americana-uk.com/interview-dean-owens-and-don-antonio-on-spirit-ridge-an-album-forged-via-friendship-family-and-shared-connections

REVIEWS

No Depression
The lyrics are profound, often mournful and the sound is rich and delicious
https://nodepression.com/album-reviews/album-review-spirit-ridge-dean-owens/

Uncut
This cultural crossover is hugely rewarding
(Not online - See end pages for clipping)

Daily Express ★★★★
(Not online – See end pages for clipping)

RnR ★★★★
Sublime mix of music and lyrics
(Not online – See end pages for clipping)

Rocking Magpie
"Spirit Ridge" sees the musical treasure that is Dean Owens going from strength to strength, building on his influences and building a body of work that gets more and more impressive. A must buy.
https://rockingmagpie.wordpress.com/2025/02/15/dean-owens-spirit-ridge/

KLOF Mag
atmospheric and evocative
https://klofmag.com/2025/02/dean-owens-spirit-ridge/

The Midlands Rocks
a dozen sun kissed songs that (will) touch your heart... like a gently humming Marshall amplifier or brand new engine oil it is thick, golden and emits a warm glow…
https://themidlandsrocks.co.uk/dean-owens-spirit-ridge/

Americana UK
Funky… 8/10
https://americana-uk.com/dean-owens-spirit-ridge

At The Barrier
Owens is one of the bigger hitters, homegrown talent able to hold his own with the best of the USA
https://atthebarrier.com/2025/02/14/dean-owens-spirit-ridge-album-review/

Fresh Faves (Fresh On The Net) – Burn It All
Dean's gritty, distinctive vocal brings a bluesy edge, set against some cool guitar effects and harmonies
https://freshonthenet.co.uk/2025/02/faves556/

Lonesome Highway
a continuation of Owens' ever engaging musical journey. Highly recommended
https://www.lonesomehighway.com/music-reviews/2025/2/9/tyx75ggn4ymyjrtxqo65yct26y935b

Three Chords And The Truth
Collaborative and immersive to the core while satisfyingly stimulating… a delightful meaningful record, both tender and invigorating in places.
https://threechordsandthetruthuk.blogspot.com/2025/02/album-review-dean-owens-spirit-ridge.html

Album Of the Year
It's rich, cinematic, atmospheric, personal, deep, authentic, heartfelt and touching
https://www.albumoftheyear.org/user/lunaplume/album/1225301-spirit-ridge/

Maximum Volume Music
Dean Owens is the best storyteller of his type on these shores… **9/10**
https://maximumvolumemusic.com/review-dean-owens-spirit-ridge-2025/

NETHERLANDS, EUROPE
Heaven Magazine
Album Of The Week
https://www.heavenmagazine.nl/actueel/_week2507

Tekstenstek
album full of atmosphere
https://tekstenstek.nl/index.php/2025/02/14/spirit-ridge-dean-owens

Bluestown Music (listing)
https://bluestownmusic.nl/new-release-dean-owens-spirit-ridge/

Dirty Rock Magazine
Many would kill for songs like this, which Don Antonio knows how to round off with fantastic arrangements... ***There is no doubt, Dean Owens is an important name on the European scene for all roots rock lovers.*** *(Burn it all – suddenly everything leads to a soul funk that evokes Stax).*
https://www.dirtyrock.info/2025/02/dean-owens-spirit-ridge/

Free Zone Magazine (Italy)
https://freezonemagazine.com/articoli/dean-owens-spirit-ridge/

USA
The Alternate Root
a necessary acquisition
http://www.thealternateroot.com/all-reviews/dean-owens-from-the-album-spirit-ridge
Spotify Playlist -
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1LLC2Z4VSMIy2Xu4nJTXzc?si=H1y5CenPQ5uYphDK7Tt6Ag

RADIO
UK
Iain Anderson Show- Wall of Death, BBC Radio Scotland

Another Country With Ricky Ross, BBC Radio Scotland

Mike Davies (Brum Radio)– Sinner Of Sinners
www.mixcloud.com/BrumRadio/alternative-roots-with-mike-davies-16022025/

Mike Ritchie – Celtic Music Radio
2/2 – Sinner of Sinners, 9/2 – A Divine Tragedy, 16/2 – Spirit Of Us
https://www.mixcloud.com/celt95fm/mike-ritchie-on-sunday-sunday-16-february-2025/
Album Of The Week – Celtic Music Radio – 15 March

FEATURES & CUTTINGS

The Herald (UK)

The Herald 16.02.25 Life Features

Scottish Borders inspires

DEAN Owens was blown away when he first saw the recording studio in Italy where he was to record his remarkable new album, Spirit Ridge.

Crinale Studio is based in a 400-year-old farmhouse in the hills of Emilia-Romagna region, not far from Bologna. To say it is idyllic is to understate things slightly. A video posted on Facebook by Owens shows the place in all its rustic, picturesque splendour, with fabulous views to the hills beyond.

"It was really stunning, really special," he said earlier this week. "And to turn up there and not really know what I was in for... I just felt at home right away.

"I have ancestors who came from that part of Italy so there was definitely a strong connection there. Whether that was just in my mind or not, I'm not sure, but I think there was definitely something going on."

Owens had been introduced to Don Antonio, the renowned musician and producer who owns Crinale, by a mutual friend John Convertino, the drummer with, and co-founder of, the Tucson, Arizona-based indie band Calexico. Owens's collaborations with Calexico had resulted in two excellent albums – Sinner's Shrine (2022) and El Tiradito: The Curse Of Sinner's Shrine (2023).

"John and I had been talking about our respective heritage [Owens is originally from Leith] and I started talking about Sacri Cuori, this Italian band that I really liked. I knew John had played with them, and it turned out to be Don Antonio's band. John made the introduction and I'm very glad that he did."

Returning home to the Scottish Borders, Owens was inspired by the scenery he came across during long walks. He then made his way back to Crinale to record the album, in long, intense, enjoyable sessions.

The relaxed, family atmosphere at Crinale, and Don Antonio's expertise, bled into the recording process.

"He was certainly heavily involved. He brings all of the equipment he has collected over the years, and it's all really vintage guitars and other instruments. Mainly all Italian-made, too. Some of them are museum pieces.

"It's different from being in a more structured studio environment. Italians are big on family, and family gatherings. There were a few gatherings during the recording process. Sometimes, they were sprung upon me," he added with a laugh.

Wine from Don Antonio's family vineyard helped fuel the recording sessions. Convertino, and his bandmates Martin Wenk and Tom Hagerman, contribute to the album, as do Don Antonio and his friends, the guitarist Luka Giovacchini and drummer Piero Perelli.

Some songs on Spirit Ridge, which was launched at a sold-out Celtic Connections gig at Oran Mor on February 2, were inspired by the beauty of Crinale,

including the luminous opening track, Eden is Here.

"I moved out of the city for the first time in my life a few years ago," said Owens. "I'm very much a city boy but now, living in the Borders countryside, you can't really help but be affected a bit more by nature and landscape. I didn't see as much of these, living in the city. When I went to Crinale to work I was surrounded by nature. It definitely had an effect on how I was writing songs for this new album."

Atmospheric, literate and deeply personal, and with an intimate ambience in the way in which it was recorded, Spirit Ridge is one of the best albums that Dean has made yet. Listening to it and his previous work, it's not difficult to see why has found favour with people including Irvine Welsh, Ian Rankin and Bob Harris, and attracted favourable reviews from such knowledgeable magazines as Rolling Stone and Uncut.

His accolades include Best UK artist and album, in Americana UK readers' polls, and the 2019 UK Song Of The Year for Southern Wind (the title track of his 2018 album), courtesy of the UK Americana Music Association.

One of the most exquisitely moving songs on Spirit Ridge is A Divine Tragedy, which has its roots in the domestic difficulties experienced by a couple he knows. "That was one of the songs that I didn't know if they were going to make the album or not," Owens said. "Don Antonio really liked it. It's a sad song, really: it was written about a couple of friends of mine who were going through a divorce after a really long marriage. I was just thinking about them and trying to put myself in their position. You can never do that, but as a writer it's something you have to do. It was an emotional song to sing, to be honest, because those friends are really close. I think and I hope it will strike a chord with a lot of people."

Another track on Spirit Ridge, The Buzzard And The Crow, is probably his favourite at the moment. "I love how it came out. It's such a simple song. It's got just three chords, and that never changes, but there's a lot of movement within those three chords.

"One of my favourite artists is Tom Petty. Although that song doesn't sound anything like him, I always loved the way that he could take a simple three-song structure and devise all those great melodies within those three chords.

"I had the melody for the song and it just so happened that it needed three chords, which was great, as I wouldn't say I'm the most versatile and efficient guitar player. Whenever there are the fewest chords, I'm happy."

Owens and his band The Sinners are taking to the road again in March, their 13 dates in Australia (supported by National Lottery/Creative Scotland) including three festivals, one of them the 18th Port Fairy Folk Festival (other acts at that four-day event include Skerryvore, Todd Rundgren, and Cat Power with her 1966 Bob Dylan show). Thereafter, Dean and the band are playing seven gigs in the Netherlands.

Before then – this coming Thursday, in fact – they will be closer to home, at the Tolbooth in Stirling. Expect to hear songs from across Owens's entire career.

"I'm 12 albums in now and it's really hard to condense all of that," he said. "What's good, and what is helping me with this run of dates, is that there is a new album. We'll be mainly focused on the newer stuff but that doesn't mean there will be older songs."

His Italian ancestor, incidentally, turns out to be his great-great-grandfather, Dominic Ambrose Salvona, whose family came from Emilia-Romagna. And thereby hangs quite a story.

"He was a lion tamer," said Dean. "He came over as a small child from Italy and settled in Scotland. In adult life he started a circus. He finished his days in the Highlands and he's buried in Tomnahurich, in Inverness. I'd seen family-tree stuff before but I didn't actually make the connection with him and Emilia-Romagna. I was there on a reconnaissance trip to check the studio out and after doing some research I realised that that was actually where the family came from.

"It was a nice coincidence, and it added to the whole spiritual nature of the new record. I do think it's quite a spiritual record. It's not religious or anything like that. I hope, anyway, that I tried to bring a bit of an ethereal quality to the songs on this record.

"When I made the record with Calexico I only really had a certain palette to choose from – the Calexico palette, a very good and rich one at that – but with this new album, I think there were a lot more colours to choose from."

Dean Owens and The Sinners, Tolbooth, Stirling, February 20. The new album Spirit Ridge is released on CD, vinyl and digital on the Continental Song City label. deanowens.com

DEAN OWENS

★★★★

Spirit Ridge

(CONTINENTAL SONG CITY) www.deanowens.com

After three decades in music, Dean Owens remains as prolific as ever. *Spirit Ridge*, the latest album from this Scottish singer-songwriter, is a haunting exploration of life, and the people and the places dear to us. The sound is a sublime mix of melodies and lyricism that complement one another. *Spirit Ridge* is musical escapism driven by a collision of organic and electric instruments.

Opening with a dramatic crack of thunder, 'Eden Is Here' sets the mood as Dean's voice floats in, followed by the flamenco-styled 'Spirito' and the aching 'My Beloved Hills'. Dean effortlessly shifts musical approaches with tracks like the funky 'Burn It All', fired by a classic wah-wah sound. 'Sinner Of Sinners' and 'A Divine Tragedy' boast some of the best lyrics on the album.

That said, Dean can still let loose and lift the spirits, as on 'Wall Of Death', and 'Tame The Lion' creates a bluesy and atmospheric piece of reflection. All said, the emotion and pain Owens projects is honest and, track after track, *Spirit Ridge* draws you into his musical world.

Kevin Burke

RnR Magazine (Mar 2025)
Review + feature

F RAPIDS

★★

ras

ABEL) www.taffrapids.com

Now here's some Welsh bluegrass, or *Bluegras*, courtesy of the debut album by this four-piece outfit based in T, and they have adapted the lonesome sound' well to the capital. There are the ted dazzling, lightning-fast n banjo, fiddle and guitar, and ocals – many in English, though are of course several songs in , the tones and inflections of sound well-suited to the style fine, with the harmonies very on point, too.

songs themselves are all als, and cover most bluegrass , from the vaguely 20s-styled ly jazz-pop of 'Nonco Monco' rst single), the folky 'Dacw iad', and the country flavour e Hours', to the excellent ht bluegrass of 'Red Tail the driving instrumental down of 'Mister Mearer', and ntemporary pop inflections of osing 'One For The Road'.

en Eedens (fiddle), Siôn ll Jones (guitar), David Grubb) and Clem Saynor (bass) have their *Bluegras* to the music's al home in Raleigh, North na, and been well received – u can't argue with that.

Norman Darwen

A KIRKE

★

lazer

OT) www.ilovelolakirke.com

When Lola Kirke first emerged back in 2018 with her debut album, much was made of the fact that she was the daughter on Kirke, drummer for Free and

mpany back in the uch was also made fact that, rather llow in her father's ps, Ms. Kirke was g down a Nashville y path and was proving to be uccessful with it and a ning film career. *lazer* is her fourth album and es in the wake of her book, *Wild illage*, which chronicles 'her ctional upbringing... and her l path to Nashville and country as the blurb says. Whatever, s to say that *Trailblazer* is an sive listen, eschewing country for a more immersive dive into ries one usually associates with a Williams, Emmylou Harris or ewell.

With many of the songs written in conjunction with her book, there's a fair amount of biography in them. The vibrant country-rock of 'Easy On You' addresses the perils of addiction, while 'Zeppelin III' seems to directly address Kirke's relationship with her famous father. Standouts are 'Mississippi, My Sister, Elvis And Me' and 'Bury Me In NYC', the latter quite brilliant.

Paul Kerr

RED SKY JULY

★★★★

Misty Morning

(SHADOWBIRDS)

www.shellypoole.com/red-sky-july

On their fourth album, *Misty Morning*, Red Sky July seek to extend their range of Americana with added 'found sound' and cinematic effects. Formed in 2008 by Shelly Poole and her husband, ex-Texas guitarist Ally McErlaine, the band is now joined by singer Haley Glennie-Smith. Initially a 'soul food' side-project which gained momentum, they've toured as guests of Sheryl Crow, Steve Earle and Jools Holland.

Right away we hear a wide-eyed precocity in the delivery, akin to Emmylou Harris, where fragility and resilience meet. But there's a sunny optimism in these winsome acoustics and waterfall melodies, as on 'Stones And Brambles' where Poole sounds enthralled as a songbird, devoted as an eternal lover. The soaring 'Kings Of Better Things' is shaken with synth drones and drums, giving a Lanois-like hex, while 'I Found Angels' gains added mystery from its murmuring vocal overlaps.

'Utah' has echoing guitar and rumbling rhythms with a yearning wanderlust in the compelling chorus.

Scottish singer-songwriter **Dean Owens** is a busy man. His new album, *Spirit Ridge*, is his fourth since 2022, and he's also issued a couple of EP trilogies. He credits, if that's the right word, lockdown for some of this burst of creativity. "I'd made *Sinner's Shrine* with my friends from Calexico," he explains, "but we had to hold back the release and while I was waiting on that I was very creative, wrote and played a lot, so I followed it up right away with another album called *El Tiradito*, again with Calexico.

"And then John Convertino [Calexico drummer] introduced me via e-mail to an Italian musician/producer called Don Antonio, and I mentioned to him that I really wanted to maybe go out and find out a little bit more about my family." Said family includes his great-great-grandfather, who was born in Italy and worked as a lion tamer! "Don Antonio sold me this idea of recording with him in this studio," he goes on, "which was a 400-year-old farmhouse in the hills, just outside Bologna.

"So I went out there and met him and we got on really well. And just by chance a couple of his musicians were there and we ended up having a little jam session in this wonderful old place. I found out that this was the region that my great-great-grandfather had come from! It just felt right, so I came back from that trip and I started getting all these song ideas, and that led to me going back out the following spring to make the record."

Owens's music tends to be classed as Americana but in reality it's much broader than that. "It's an interesting tag to have," he says, "and I'm very happy to have it because I feel like a lot of my music has been inspired by my travels in America. I read a lot of literature by American authors, and I am very interested in the landscape of the desert. The Americana community have been really supportive and kind to me, and I have been a part of it as much as I can."

Spirit Ridge will also be branded Americana, which Owens is fine with yet there's a lot of variety on it. You can hear echoes of The Waterboys and Talk Talk for instance, two of Owens's favourite bands. "It's a bit more ethereal," he muses, "but when I'm standing in the studio looking out at John Convertino and Joey Burns, not only is it going to have an Americana feel but I'm as happy as, well, a pig in you know what. That said, Antonio had some great ideas and occasionally he took me down a path where I wouldn't have thought to go. It's a great thing to have somebody that you trust who can do that."

The results speak for themselves. From the black dog song 'Wall Of Death' to the sweeping melancholy of 'A Divine Tragedy', *Spirit Ridge* is a triumph. Owens is already thinking about the next thing, though. "I want to try to do as much as I can," he says. "It just dawned on me the other day that I'm never going to be able to get around to finishing all the songs I've ever started, I've got that many! I've got a couple of things I'm thinking about though, maybe with Will Kimbrough or Neilson Hubbard." Plenty to look forward to, then.

JEREMY SEARLE

Photo: Neilson Hubbard

All Sections

THE SCOTSMAN

Dean Owens: Spirit Ridge (Continental Song City) ★★★★

The grandfatherly inspiration continues on Edinburgh Americana artist **Dean Owens**'s latest album. In contrast to his recent collaborations with Arizona outfit Calexico, Spirit Ridge was recorded in rural Emilia-Romagna in Italy, with thoughts of his Italian circus performer great-great-grandfather on the bluesy Tame the Lion. But his Tex Mex tastes are evident on the stormy Spirito, while panoramic country rocker Light This World is garnished with mellifluous mariachi trumpet.

Mood and tone switch on the rougher, tougher The Buzzard and the Crow with its brooding strings and trembling percussion, while Burn It All is an outright commercial blues rocker. He may not have the mainstream appeal of Sam Fender, but Owens has carved his credible place as a songwriter who comfortably inhabits the US/Mexican borderlands in his beautifully arranged music. Chamber pop ballad My Beloved Hills is a particularly fine example of his art, while a plangent new version of an old ballad Spirit Of Us is a reminder that those skills are long honed.

By Fiona Shepherd
Music Critic

DEAN OWENS
Spirit Ridge
CONTINENTAL SONG CITY

Rich Americana from veteran Scottish songwriter

Although born in Leith, songwriter Dean Owens has recorded most of his solo albums in the US with musicians like Will Kimbrough and Joey Burns of Calexico. That makes *Spirit Ridge* something of a departure. While the music remains wedded to a particularly vibrant form of Americana, the album was recorded in Italy with largely local musicians plus guests like Calexico drummer John Convertino. This cultural crossover is hugely rewarding, bringing a three-dimensional feel to songs like "Light This World" and "Wall Of Death", one of several circus-themed songs that tip a nod to Owens's great-great-grandfather, an Italian lion tamer who died in Scotland in 1917.

PETER WATTS

UNCUT
Jan 2025

DEAN OWENS
Spirit Ridge
★★★★ (Continental Song City)

As he did with previous album Sinner's Shrine, Scottish singer-songwriter Owens teased this release with three EP releases last year containing some of the songs, along with other works done alongside Italian producer Don Antonio and Calexico's John Convertino amongst others. Switching from the desert plains of America to the spaghetti western feel of Italy has not dimmed his creativity, as shown by tracks like Eden Is Here and Wall Of Death, a circus-themed tribute to his great-great-grandfather, who was a lion tamer!

Daily Express
Friday, February 14, 2025