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MUSIC REVIEWS: New bluegrass releases

By KEITH LAWRENCE

THE CHARLIE SIZEMORE BAND, "Good News," Rounder. 14 tracks.

At 46, Charlie Sizemore is a veteran of more than 30 years in bluegrass. He had already toured with The Goins Brothers before Ralph Stanley hired the then-16-year-old to replace Keith Whitley as his lead singer three decades ago.

Sizemore stayed with Stanley's Clinch Mountain Boys for nearly a decade before going out on his own. But he was also took time out to get a degree in political science (with honors) from the University of Kentucky, attend law school and establish a solo practice in a Nashville suburb.

So, it's been a long wait for fans since his last album - 2002's "The Story Is...The Songs of Tom T. Hall." The fact that "The Story Is" was one of 2002's best albums made the wait seem even longer. But Sizemore is back in bluegrass now with a new band and a new album.

Call it countrygrass, a smooth blend of country music and bluegrass by one of the best vocalists in either genre. He's known for his songwriting as well as his vocals and picking. And Sizemore doesn't disappoint with four new songs on "Good News" - "I Won't Be Far From Here," about a man waiting patiently for his love to return; "Alison's Band," about a picker with a crush on Alison Krauss; "The Less That I Drink," about a man who discovers that the less he drinks the more he doesn't want her around; and "The Silver Bugle," a Civil War ghost song.

There's some super picking on the blazing "I've Fallen And I Can't Get Up" among other tunes. "Blame It On Vern" finds a man blaming his drinking on the songs of bluegrass and country singer Vern Gosdin. Matt DeSpain, the band's Dobro player, wrote the title cut, "Good News When I Die," and sings lead on "Hey Moon."

One of the best bluegrass or country albums of 2007 so far.

Can't find it in stores? Try www.rounder.com.