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R.E.M., Coltrane, Buena Vista Social Club, and more: 10 of the best reissues, box sets, and archival releases of 2021

Expanded editions and newly released live recordings unearth some not-heard-before treasures while casting more familiar work in a new light

Connie Smith, “Latest Shade Of Blue: The Columbia Recordings 1973-1976” (Bear Family Records)

This is the third box set released by Bear Family Records on the artist that George Jones was wont to call his favorite female country singer. It covers the four years Connie Smith spent making nine albums for Columbia Records after leaving RCA, where she began her recording career. She changed labels in part out of a desire to record more gospel music, and while the bulk of “Latest Shade of Blue” is classic, hard country music (in a sea of ‘70s Denver and Newton-John pop), that desire is also well-represented, especially by the fine collection “Sings Hank Williams Gospel.” But whether secular or spiritual, the constant here is the transcendent, soulful force of Connie Smith’s singing. (Stuart Munro)