



Cooking Vinyl 10 Allied Way London W3 0RQ

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Cowboy Junkies

New album Early 21st Century Blues (COOKCD352)

Released 1st August 2005

Monday 1st August sees the release of the Cowboy Junkies album, "Early 21st Century Blues". Recorded during February and March 2005, the album features two Michael Timmins songs, alongside interpretations of tracks by the likes of U2, Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, George Harrison, Richie Havens and John Lennon, plus two traditional numbers.

Explains the band, "By the middle of this past February (2005), we had been off the road for a few months, winter had her claws dug in deep, and it seemed like a good time to get together and play some music. An invitation was extended to our older brother John to come and sit in with his guitar. We decided to give our gathering a context: we were all to bring along two or three songs, written by others, and the themes of the songs had to relate to war, violence, fear, greed, ignorance, loss ...We hoped to reach a critical mass of material that would reach out and touch a couple of hearts and souls. Our goal was to create our own small document of hope. Over the course of five days we sat in The Clubhouse and interpreted the words and melodies of others. We let the tape run while we played and did our best to channel those early 21st century blues ..."

"Early 21st Century Blues" features the following guest musicians: John Timmins (guitar, banjo), Jeff Bird (electric mando), Jaro Czerwinec (accordion), Rebel (vocal and lyrics on I Don't Want To Be A Soldier), Bob Egan (pedal steel), Anne Bourne (cello).

About the songs :

License To Kill (Bob Dylan): For some reason I've always loved this song. It wasn't until we started to work on it that I realized how beautiful the melody is and how profound, but deceptively simple, is the lyric. Every time we played through a version someone would ask, "what do you think he means by this line....?". And a discussion would ensue. You can't ask anything more of a lyric....and that is why Bob is Bob.

Two Soldiers (traditional): This song was suggested by John. He had heard versions of it by Dylan and by Jerry Garcia and his circle of friends. I happen to have a very traditional version of it by Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard. The song's style fits perfectly with John's guitar playing. Pete and Al settled in to a characteristic Junkies groove and away we rode.

December Skies (Michael Timmins): This is one of the two original songs on the CD. It was written in October 2002 and recorded during the One Soul Now sessions. It was inspired by the news of the day and the Timothy Findley novel The Wars. If you have any doubt that "war-is-hell" then read this book. If you feel that war is a sane option to disagreements between nations then read this book.

This World Dreams Of (Michael Timmins): This is the other original song on the album. This one was also written for One Soul Now. We never got a recording that we liked during the OSN sessions so we pulled the song out for this session, slowed it down, spaced it out and let it breathe. The line, "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of", is from a Tennyson poem called The Passing of Arthur. I love the line because it is both hopeful and desperate at the same time.



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Brothers Under The Bridge (Bruce Springsteen): Margo and I saw Springsteen during the Tom Joad tour. He was playing solo acoustic at Massey Hall in Toronto. It was a stunning performance, a night filled with memorable, inspiring moments. He played this song, which hadn't been released at the time and it has always stuck with me. I love the way that the lyric just ends without warning...much like the way the lives of veterans sometimes "end" without warning...the battle that rages on inside can be so much more difficult to survive. I'm sure we'll be hearing plenty of stories about a whole new generation of brothers-under-bridges in the coming years.

You're Missing (Bruce Springsteen): Is there a more beautiful, delicate, pointed song about loss? Maybe, but I can't think of one ...

Handouts In The Rain (Richie Havens): This song was introduced to me by Patty, my wife. She had heard it on a compilation put together by Paul Weller. She brought it to me and said, "I've found a song for your new record"... within a couple of verses it was pretty obvious that she was right. Our arrangement isn't nearly as complex as the original (too many weird chords, too much work). We paired it down to the essential and let Margo's voice and Richie's words do all the work. It is a beautiful song, written by a truly gifted and, in some ways, under-appreciated artist.

Isn't It A Pity (George Harrison): We started performing this song last year on the Long Journey Home Tour. It was suggested by Margo and it, along with December Skies, was the inspiration for this collection of songs. The lyrics still ring true thirty years after they were written. And, unfortunately, they will, no doubt, ring true thirty years from now and then thirty years after that and so on....human nature is a difficult and unfathomable beast.

No More (traditional): We performed a version of this song at our very first gig back in 1985. We heard a version of an old field recording and decided that we could probably do a knock-up version since we weren't black, had no experience of slavery, had never even touched a farm implant or picked anything that grew from the ground, except for the occasional weed....Whites Off Earth Now!! Indeed. Alan remembered the song and suggested that we bring it back. It seemed to have a new resonance in the context of these other songs.

Don't Want To Be A Soldier (John Lennon): Another song that I've always wanted to cover. The lyrics are about as existential as one can get (not that I'm too sure about the definition of existentialism, but if a lyric can be existential then this one has got to be, doesn't it?). We decided to have some fun with this one. We set up a drum loop and jammed away. After it was all over we realized that there was a definite hip-hop motion to the loop so we invited a friend of ours, Kevin Bond (aka Rebel) to write and record a rap, based on the themes that were driving the songs on the album. We then dumped the whole mess in Jeff Wolpert's lap and asked him to make sense of it.

One (U2): I'm not a huge U2 fan, although I have truck loads of respect for them. My wife suggested this song and it had always been one of my guilty pleasures. Once I started playing it the beauty of the chord changes just took over. It is a pleasure to play. John reminded me that Johnny Cash had covered it on his last record, so we made a point of not listening to his version. Lyrically it is a beautiful punctuation mark (whether it is a period, question mark or exclamation mark is debatable) to the themes that are explored throughout the album... "We are one, but we're not the same. We got to carry each other, carry each other"... yup.

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