



Rodney Crowell “**The Outsider**” Sony/BMG Recordings

On “**The Outsider**” Crowell carries on where he left off with “**Fate’s Right Hand,**” the 2003 recording that he [also] co-produced with Peter Coleman. Coleman also contributed to the 2001 Sugar Hill release “**The Houston Kid**” which revived Crowell’s solo career.

The upbeat album opener [a love song!] “Say You Love Me,” features a girl with “*Irish eyes and the raven hair.*” Why I chose to specifically mention those assets will become obvious later. The second cut “The Obscenity Prayer” sub-titled “Give It To Me” is a sharply focused, point the finger, pull no punches swipe at today’s greed driven, instant gratification generation. A tongue-in-cheek element also threads its way through the lyric, one example being “*The Dixie Chicks can kiss my ass*” followed by the conditional [and hypocritical] “*But I still need that backstage pass.*” The funky sounding “The Outsider” featuring Jim Horn’s sax, contains a few melodic moments straight out of the Stax and Beatles songbooks, while “Dancin’ Circles Round The Sun [Epictetus Speaks],” featuring lead guitarist Stuart Smith, a long time Crowell collaborator/sideman, also smacks of Fab Four inspiration.

“Beautiful Despair” opens with the alcohol impaired “*Beautiful despair is hearing Dylan when you’re drunk at 3 a.m., Knowing that chances are no matter what you’ll never write like him, Oh Brother.*” The cut features some fine lead guitar work from Will Kimbrough, supported by a Jonathan Yudkin led string quartet. “Don’t Get Me Started” is Rodney’s “how it is these days” confessional take on America’s political adventures at home, as well as in the Middle East and other foreign destinations. He leavens the relentless verbal blows he has delivered with “*I’m a drag when I’ve had a few drinks,*” but, poetically speaking, makes a stand for his homeland with “*I wish the rest of the world would get off our back*” but adds that the boys at the top in D.C. “*seem crazy as bedbugs and they don’t give a whit*” – by way of insight, the preceding line ended with “*admit!*” The hymn like presentation “Ignorance Is The Enemy” features spoken interludes from Rodney’s old boss Emmylou Harris, the husky tones of John Prine and finally Crowell, while the supporting choir includes the singing Miller’s – Buddy & Julie, drummer Vini Santoro and the Jenkins sisters, Kacie & Brodie.

Pursuing the “*grass is always greener on the other side*” train of thought, speaking on behalf of those living on the eastern boundary of the mighty Atlantic, it seems to me that there has always been a certain magic and mysticism inherent in place names like Phoenix, St. Cloud and Creeque Alley. The lyric to “Glasgow Girl” – “*Skin like milk, Hair black silk, And eye’s like cobalt pearl*” - includes mention of British locations such as London’s Camden Town, and, respectively, travelling northwards Sheffield, Glasgow and Aberdeen. The insight that the narrator is “*stuck out on the Ring Road with a million miles to go*” just doesn’t seem to capture those rays of seemingly eternal sunshine. Let’s leave it there.....suffice to mention [again], those “*Irish eyes and raven hair.*” Bearing the clever “poetic turnaround” title “Things That Go Bump In The Day,” the lyric amounts to another comment on scenes from, that inexorable daily grind, life. The only cover tune and penultimate track is Dylan’s “Shelter From The Storm” and dates from the Minnesota Kid’s legendary 1975 album “**Blood On the Tracks.**” Emmylou and Rodder’s duet on this “offer a helping hand to your fellow man” themed cut. The lyric to “We Can’t Turn Back Now,” the Irish jig paced album closer, name-checks a couple of *outsiders* from history – Nostradamus and Jethro Tull, for a few seconds musically references the Seeger/Carawan/Hamilton/Horton call to arms “We Shall Overcome,” recalls 9/11 with “*But that could change in a New York minute,*” and in summation attempts to overview the contents of “**The Outsider.**” 9/11 is also referenced by “*Sorry about the World Trade Centre*” in “The Obscenity Prayer [Give It To Me].”

“**The Outsider**” is a mixed, rock driven collection containing a significant measure of lyrical repetition and attitude, leavened by the occasional bright spot. Frankly, I know Crowell is capable of better. Much better.

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 09/05.