



Lee Clayton "**The Capitol Years**" Acadia/Evangeline Records

The three albums I'm about to review, thanks to this 2CD reissue by the U.K. based independent label Acadia Records, first saw the light of day on Capitol Records during the period 1978-1981 and were respectively titled "**Border Affair**," "**Naked Child**" and "**The Dream Goes On.**" "**Border Affair**" was actually Clayton's sophomore solo release, his self-titled debut having appeared on MCA Records a handful or so years earlier. That album closed with one of Lee's early career signature songs "Ladies Love Outlaws." Of course a few years later thanks to RCA Victor and in particular Waylon Jennings as well as Messrs. Glaser, Colter and Nelson a whole [country] music movement was spawned by Lee's lyric. I've no intention of dwelling on that subject; circa 1975, out in California, Clayton and Irish bred guitarist Phillip Donnelly forged a musical partnership that came to fruition in what I consider, sonically at least, to verge on heavy metal country rock - sic. though present, the sound of acoustic guitars form a minor element in the sound mix. And don't let the foregoing nom de plume fool you because, lyrically speaking during the years since his MCA debut appeared, Clayton's reflections on love and life had moved on to embrace an intensity that frankly has rarely been matched. This is probably the wrong place to state categorically that these albums are classics and remain as fresh as ever.....but there, I've said it.

In the early nineteen-nineties Messrs Jennings, Nelson, Cash & Kristofferson enjoyed chart success with "Silver Stallion" the opening song on "**Border Affair.**" An ode to personal freedom, images of Clayton and the wild stallion racing, as one, across the open plane - "*teach him he can trust me like a brother*" - give way in the second verse to "*I'm gonna find me a reckless woman, With razor blades and dice in her eyes, With just a touch of sadness in her fingers, And thunder and lightning in her eyes.*" Lee seemed to love living on the edge - of a precipice. Wayne Jackson's trumpet and Andrew Love's saxophone [+] aided by Jimmy Day's pedal steel inject a Tex-Mex flavour into the waltz paced love ballad "If You Can Touch Her At All." "Back Home In Tennessee" is a paean to attaining faith and a home on Earth, while by way of [multiple] similes the album title cut reflects on the voyage we each make through life. "Old Number Nine" finds Lee recall the time he flew 'widowmakers' [\*] in the U.S.A.F. "Like A Diamond" reflects [once again] on the human condition but from a marginally different perspective, the ballad "My Women My Love" is introduced by Donnelly intricately finger picking a guitar, while the opening verse of "Tequila Is Addictive" name checks alcohol as well as cocaine. A beautiful sadness pervades the lines of the bittersweet "My True Love," 'beautiful' because with our eyes we exercise the will to see clearly, 'sadness' because we can never possess all that we observe. "**Border Affair**" closed with "Rainbow In The Sky," penned by Clayton and Donnelly, it's the only co-written number in this reprised collection.

Where the ten song "**Border Affair**" could be looked upon as an *entrée*, "**Naked Child**" is an eight song *main course* - and that's in spite of the fact that the recording sessions were fraught with personnel difficulties. Donnelly's electric guitar appears louder, his solo excursions wilder, while the song lyrics are most definitely hewn from the dark side of the human psyche. Opening with the melodic yet recklessly breakneck paced "Saturday Night Special" - "*Ah, tonight I could wrestle the Devil, Cause I know that I couldn't lose,*" it's followed by "I Ride Alone" a no holds barred statement of Lee's [personal] ethos. If you listen closely, toward the close of the latter track, you'll hear Lee's German Shepherd 'Elvis Firewolf' howl in parallel with Phillip's similarly toned electric guitar. Where the latter cuts runs out at a tad over five minutes duration, Clayton tops that by a clear minute with the apocalyptic "10000 Light Years/Sexual Moon." "Wind And Rain" which closes [reissue] Disc 1 is a love song that is woven around references to the climate and barren earthbound landscapes.

[Reissue] Disc 2 opens with the self-explanatory ballad "I Love You" and is followed by "Jaded Virgin" a paean to a woman of the night. "A Little Cocaine" relates how once estranged lovers reunite the dilemma being that one party is hell bent on experimenting with beautiful danger, and Lee's second Capitol album closed with the autobiographical "If I Can Do It [So Can You]." Where "**Naked Child**" found Clayton at times enraged then sanguine, when the eight song "**The Dream Goes On**" first arrived in the public domain it left little doubt that he had little patience for injustice and double dealing, but all the time in the world for women and love. "What's A Mother Gonna Do" proved to be another edgy autobiographical creation, while "Industry" finds Lee rail in anger at the 'dirty' atomic research labs and manufacturing plants of Oak Ridge where he was raised. That said, the love themed "Won't You Give Me One More Chance" furnishes a lighter moment, only to be followed by "Draggin' Them Chains" a condemnation of consumerism. "Where Is The Justice" chronicles one of Lee's European tours – when listening to this song, note that the Berlin Wall didn't fall for another eight years - while "Whatcha Gonna Do" furnishes his template for living. A lullaby, "Oh How Lucky I Am" is performed a cappella. However, should the lyric be taken at face value? Did Lee have a wicked twinkle in one eye when composing the song? And then we come to the melodic closing opus "The Dream Goes On." At the outset the narrator imagines performing at Madison Square Garden then adds *"If I had no dreams to cling to, I'd be cold, I'd be lifeless, just like the moon,"* and at the close swears allegiance to a belief that almost three decades on, certainly in public and business life, is tarnished and practically valueless. That belief? – why it's *"To always speak the truth and be a good man – that's my plan."* A handful of years later with "Dog Eat Dog" the unsinkable Joni Mitchell added a female voice.

The eight-page liner booklet that accompanies this release features insightful notes penned by Alan Robinson, but sadly the song lyrics are missing from the package. Few songwriters actually touch the Holy Grail...."**The Capitol Years**" prove Clayton certainly enjoyed his 'fifteen minutes' of contact, times three. Consigned to a desert island existence I'd fight tooth and nail to take these albums with me. I love them. Always have. Always will. And for the first time ever all they've been gathered together as the triumphant triumvirate that they are.....

**Note.**

[+] – Jackson and Love are also known as the Memphis Horns.

[\*] – The plane Lee mainly flew was the McDonnell RF101 Voodoo.

Folkwax Score 10 out of 10

**Arthur Wood.**

Kerrville Kronikles 02/08.