



Dave Alvin And The Guilty Women *Same Yep* Roc Records

Last year's three-day Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival, the eighth such event, took place at the Speedway Meadow in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. The bill on Saturday 4th October included the debut performance by Dave Alvin And The Guilty Women. Eight women – acknowledged masters of their chosen instrument(s), who hail from a wide range of musical genres - took the stage that day, namely Cindy Cashdollar (steel guitar, lap steel), Nina Gerber (electric guitar), Laurie Lewis (violin, mandolin, harmony vocals), Christy McWilson (lead and harmony vocals), Sarah Brown (bass), Amy Farris (violin, viola, harmony vocals), Lisa Pankratz (drums, percussion) and Suzy Thompson (accordion). Unrehearsed, ten songs later the players and audience knew they had just experienced something quite special.

Alvin and seven of the aforementioned pickers cut this twelve-song set at Asleep At The Wheel founder Ray Benson's Bismieux Studio in Austin last December, plus there are guest appearances by Thompson and Marcia Ball (piano). Half the songs are Alvin originals; there's a trio penned by band members topped off by the same number of covers. From his days with The Blasters, their Golden Gate set ended with Alvin's *Marie Marie*. Featuring the twin fiddles of Lewis and Farris the song gets this album off to a great start.

Alvin also penned the ensuing numbers *California's Burning* and *Downey Girl*, the former references the drought ridden state's summer wildfires, while – without naming her - the girl is Karen Carpenter who lived in the Los Angeles County town where Alvin and his older brother Phil grew up. At the dawn of the new millennium McWilson, vocalist in Seattle's The Picketts, cut a couple of tasty Alvin produced solo albums for Hightone Records and she takes the lead on *Weight Of The World* (from Y2K's *The Lucky One*), and, later, on the achingly beautiful but sad lament *Potter's Field* – both of which she wrote. Prominently featuring solos by Cashdollar, Farris and Gerber, in the boogie woogie paced *Boss Of The Blues* Alvin recalls, as a teen, meeting one of his favourite musicians Big Joe Turner. In the process of relating Turner's musical history, Alvin's lyric name checks T-Bone Walker and Duke Ellington.

Alvin and Farris share the writing credit on the ballad *Anyway* (the title of her rather fine Alvin produced debut album), while Anna Egge and Jimmie Dale Gilmore penned *River Under The Road* with Sarah Brown. Gerber toured for over a decade as support guitarist for the late Kate Wolf (d. 1986) and from that folksinger's vast song catalogue Dave and the girls cover *These Times We're Living In*. Alvin's beloved mother, Nana, and some guitar toting music legend by the surname of Hendrix are the principal players in *Nana And Jimi*. Completing this collection is an almost seven-minute long rendition of Tim Hardin's classic *Don't Make Promises* on which he's joined vocally by Christy, and the pair also team up on the closing *Que Sera, Sera (Whatever Will Be, Will Be)* the 1956 # 2 transatlantic hit for Doris Day.

The song arrangements here are transcendent; the support and solo contributions by the Guilty Women are sublime. At over fifty-minutes duration Dave Alvin And The Guilty Women's marriage of folk, country, blues and rock 'n' roll and beyond, is a shoe-in for one of 2009's Albums Of The Year.

Score 10 out of 10

<http://www.davealvin.com/dave/index.html>

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 05/09.