



## Free Beer **"Free Beer"** Iris Music Group

Some thirty years back the trio Free Beer cut three albums over a period of three years. Their 1975 self-titled debut album is what I'm about to review, and was followed by **"Highway Robbery"** and, finally, **"Nouveau Chapeau."** During that decade country rock enjoyed significant popularity and where The Byrds, Poco, The Eagles etc. led, a myriad of 'carbon copy' bands followed. Most of those bands were based in California, a few in Colorado and the other South-Western states, so I guess Free Beer qualify as something of an anomaly since, Sandy Allen at least, resided in the heart of 'folk central' on MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village. During the early seventies Allen and Michael Packer had worked in the NYC based group Papa Nebo, and when they formed Free Beer they recruited Caleb Potter.

**"Free Beer"** was produced by former Papa Nebo alumni, Brenden Harkin, and the dozen songs it featured were composed individually by Messrs. Allen, Packer and Potter – the credits being democratically distributed between the band members. Driven by a blues style riff played on harp, and supported by an insistent cyclical electric guitar figure, plus soaring Crosby, Stills and Nash style vocal harmonies – a Free Beer trademark - the disc opens with Michael Packer's "I'm In Love." Sustained by country sounding tunes there are songs here that focus on - a performing musician yearning to be on tour [Potter's "Out On The Road"], dreams of living the high life [Allen's "Coupe De Ville"], personal freedom [Potter's "Cruisin'"], gigging and drinking in bars [Potter's "Brandy & Beer"], the mismatched obsessions overindulgence in alcohol and being in love [Packer's "River Of Wine"] and, of course, love gone sour [Packer's "Good Times/Sad Times"].

Drenched with the sound of a sweeping synthesiser Allen's "Riding Shotgun On A Dream Wagon" is another 'urge to be gone' opus. All in all however, it's something of an overblown affair c/w a Lovin' Spoonful style chorus – *"Sleep's just something that you do between the cigarettes"* and *"Life's just something that you do inbetween dreams."* A vocal harmony rich cut Allen's "We Can Make A Home" melodically employs a calypso rhythm, and the collection closes with Packer's remembrance of once having loved "New England Girls."

I have to say that relative to the colour rich **"Free Beer"** vinyl album sleeve – I own a copy - the artwork reproduction of the CD reissue is cheap and somewhat inadequate. The light brown froth that spewed from the beer can has been, in the copying process, unjustly obliterated by too much exposure to light. That said, the 'essential detail' of the open green door [on the right of the cover], that leads to verdant green hills, mountains and rivers is still discernible. In other words, this recording 'contains' country music. Details of the session musicians and the recording studio are similarly missing from the packaging of this reprise. Three decades on, **"Free Beer"** doesn't quite hit the same spot.

Folkwax Score 6 out of 10

**Arthur Wood.**

Kerrville Kronikles 02/08.