



Malcolm Holcombe - Pitiful Blues (Album Review) Self-released

Ten tunes furnishing further insights into the alcohol-fuelled underbelly of planet Holcombe.

The aptly titled self-release *Pitiful Blues* was principally captured at Holcombe's Dawghouse home studio in Swannanoa, North Carolina. Further contributions were added at a couple of Tulsa studios - Blue Alleluia and Souttree - by his Oklahoma based sideman Jared Tyler. He shares the production credit with Holcomb, and Tyler also engineered and mixed the recordings. The press release intimates that Jared's intention was to present a 'stripped bare' Malcolm Holcombe song collection, similar to the consummate (solo) demos that the musician has created for numerous past albums. Those demos employ *"one simple mic. capturing Malcolm, his guitar, and the rhythm of his foot on the floor."* While intention is one thing, fruition is something rather different! Holcombe's foundation has been augmented here – read window-dressed - variously, by his co-producer's dobro, mandolin, baritone electric guitar, ebo and vocals, alongside occasional contributions from Arthur Thompson (drums), Matt Hayes (upright bass), Luke Bulla (fiddle) and, on one selection, Patrick "Paddy" Ryan (drums). Based on the initial *"when it ain't broke"* principle, the question arises *"why tamper with it?"*

It would be a stretch to describe Holcombe's *'lived in'* singing voice as tutored, rather he chews on his words, swills them around in his mouth for a moment before gruffly ejecting them. In the chorus to the five-verse opening opus (and album title song), the narrator enumerates the ills besetting him and, waxing Biblical, repeats *"an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,"* following which we're *"down in the hills"* of Holcombe's beloved Blue Ridge Mountains for the genealogical "Roots." Travelling through Mississippi, overcome by the heat, the "Sign For A Sally" narrator finds relief in *"Stealin' sleep inside a bottle,"* before heading east for the climatically cooler "Savannah Blues" and the rain drenched "Another Despair." In the opening verse of "By The Boots" the narrator attests that he was *"Baptised drinkin' shine, Survivin's what I'm trained to do, And fightin' for my pride"* while in the chorus Holcombe repeats *"Don't trust the government."*

Ryan holds down the backbeat on "Words Not Spoken," and "Words Of December" opens with the seasonal *"The Christmas tree light burn in the daytime."* The chorus to the penultimate song "The Music Plays On" includes the line *"The Louisville Slugger and Geronimo,"* (undoubtedly,) a reference to the famed brand of baseball bat and the Dominican Republic bred former Major League Baseball outfielder Cesar Geronimo, while, a few lines farther along, there's mention of Radartown. The closing chorus name-checks "Rex Bob Lowenstein" the title of an early 1990's song about a mythical disc jockey penned by North Carolina bred songwriter Mark Germino. The song appeared on *Radartown*, an album on which Germino was accompanied by The Sluggers. *Pitiful Blues* closes with the memory-filled recollection "For The Love Of A Child."

<http://www.malcolmholcombe.com/> and <https://myspace.com/malcolmholcombe>

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