

BOB GIBSON – Pt. 5 – SEVEN ALBUMS

In the opening paragraph of Part 1 of this feature, I wrote *“This year, and **not before time** in my opinion, seven Bob Gibson albums have been reissued.”* The fourth and final instalment of my 1986 interview with Bob appeared in FolkWax last week, and this week I’ll be focusing on those releases. In chronological order of their ‘original’ appearance they are the Elektra Records releases **“Ski Songs”** [1959] and **“Yes I See”** [1961] recently reissued by the Collectors’ Choice label, plus from the Bob Gibson Legacy web site/record label **“Funky In The Country”** [1974], **“Gibson & Camp: Homemade Music”** [1978], **“The Perfect High”** [1980] and **“Uptown Saturday Night”** [1984] plus **“The Living Legend Years,”** the latter being a compilation featuring tracks from the quartet of Bob Gibson Legacy releases, enhanced by three previously unreleased cuts. The 1974 through 1984 releases appeared on a number of labels which I’ll name check as I focus on each disc.

Bob Gibson cut four albums for Jac Holzman’s pioneering Elektra Records. During 2002 Collectors’ Choice reissued the legendary *live set* **“Gibson And Camp At The Gate Of Horn”** [1961] featuring Mr. Gibson’s singing partner Bob ‘Hamilton’ Camp and Bob’s own **“Where I’m Bound”** [1964]. Respectively Gibson’s third and fourth Elektra releases, six years later the Illinois based imprint has reissued the other pair. **“Ski Songs”** may appear a somewhat odd title for a folk recording. During the years 1957-1961 Bob lived in Aspen, Colorado and was a keen skier. This eleven song collection marks Gibson’s transition from *“fixing traditional songs”* to an artist who penned or co-penned original material. Gibson’s initial intention had been to produce a stage show built around the songs, but the album was as far as that project progressed. The latter plandid however presage, by over two decades, Bob’s subsequent appearances on stage in, for instance, **“Courtship Of Carl Sandberg”** and, with Michael Smith, **“The Women In My Life.”** I guess the real irony is that **“Ski Songs”** proved to Gibson’s best selling album, but then his music in this instance appealed to ski buffs as well as folk fans.

By way of introducing the songs, in his liner notes, Gibson claimed they were *“Outright and outrageous lies. Set to music.”* In truth, Gibson’s **“Ski Songs”** mixed ‘the serious’ and ‘the humorous,’ while his knowledge of the activity shone though in his considerable use of skiing terminology. In the opening cut, “Celebrated Skier,” we’re introduced to a blow hard type of guy - *“I’m the best ever”* - that you might find propped up by the lodge bar, of an evening, following an active day spent on the slopes. Co-written with Shirley Sealy, Blanche Nardin and Gail Pitts, the ballad “In This White World” celebrates the beauty of a snow covered piste and equates skiing at speed down a slope to that of ‘soaring free like an eagle.’ Two collaborations by Enid and Larry Rieser and Gibson featured in the collection, namely “Super Skier” and “Talking Skier.” Both humorous, the latter takes the form of a talking blues, while the former was subsequently covered by the Chad Mitchell Trio on **“Mighty Day On Campus”** [1961]. Bob’s banjo and Joe Puma’s electric guitar support his “Super Skier” vocal, presaging the folk/rock genre by a handful of years.

Bob injects a little [folk] ethnicity into the mix with the love song “Highlands Lassie,” “Bend In His Knees” cautions on the aftermath of skiing accidents, while “Ski Patrol” co-written with Jim Fuerst and Hans Wurman celebrates Charles Minot “Minnie” Dole, who, in 1938, founded America’s National Ski Patrol. On “Ski Patrol” Puma’s guitar delivers a jazz tinged mid-song solo. “Skiin’ In The Mornin’” is a happy-go-lucky number that describes the joy of skiing, while editorship of the “Super Skier’s Last Race” lyric is credited to Gibson, Holzman and album engineer Mark Abramson, and is underpinned by the melody to “Battle Hymn Of The Republic.” The second Gibson, Sealy, Nardin and Pitts co-write “What’ll We Do,” featuring un-credited [in the liner] support vocalists – male and female, most definitely possesses the feel of a stage musical song. The lyrics suggest than when the snow [in Aspen] melts, skiers will merely journey south to snow covered slope in Chile. Gibson’s “Skol To The Skier” ends the album as he began, in a barroom, toasting the sport.

Featuring words and new music by Bob Gibson, **“Yes I See”** opens with the album title track. A couple of months after this album was released when Gibson and Camp recorded their Gate of Horn live album, “Yes I See” was co-opted into the “Civil War Trilogy.” Much to Holzman’s chagrin **“Yes I See”** was recorded at RCA Victor studio for the, then, massive sum of \$1600, and prominently features the voices of Bessie Smith and the Gospel Pearls. “Springhill Mine Disaster,” penned by the

late English folk musician Ewan McColl [d. 1989] and his, then, American bred wife Peggy Seeger, recalls the 1958, third and final, calamitous loss of life at this Nova Scotia pit – an event that quickly led to its closure. Evidence that Gibson and Camp were already an established songwriting team is furnished by the Biblically themed lyric and gospel arrangement of “Well, Well, Well,” the first of three duo originals on this album. Albert Frank Beddoe’s “Copper Kettle” is a mellifluous number that relates the delights of distilling your own while keeping a watchful eye for the excise man, and is followed by Gibson’s version of the traditional tale of “John Henry” a true ‘steel-driving’ phenomenon. Collected by folklorist/singer Frank Warner, and variously known as “Gilgarrah Mountain,” “Kilgary Mountain” and contemporaneously as “Whiskey In The Jar,” arranged by Gibson and Camp the song appears here as “Gilgarry Mountain [Darling Sportin’ Jenny].”

Supported by the Gospel Pearls, Bob’s updated interpretation of the traditional “Motherless Children” possesses a pop feel relative to the other album cuts. Gibson’s uptempo rearrangement of the traditional “Daddy Roll ‘Em” is perfectly complemented by the voices of the Gospel Pearls, while their frenetic contribution to Gibson/Camp arrangement of “You Can Tell The World” simply never gels. Chirpin’ crickets best describes the latter! A few years later Simon & Garfunkel covered the song on their debut recording. Although not credited on the liner “Trouble In Mind” was penned by Richard Jones, a New Orleans bred jazz man and arranger who played an important part in the development of jazz and blues in Chicago from the early 1920s onward. “**Yes I See**” closes with the other Gibson/Camp co-writes, “By And By” and “Blues Around My Head [When The Sun Comes Up in The Mornin’].”

During the late nineteen-sixties Gibson retired from performing and recording for a couple of years. Enticed to re-enter the music business, during 1970 Capitol Records released a self-titled album. Four years later Bob, initially, self-released “**Funky In The Country.**” The album was subsequently reissued by the Cambridge, Wisconsin based imprint Mountain Railroad Records. Accompanied by John Guth [guitar] and recorded in concert on 9th April 1974 at Amazingrace in Evanston, Illinois, the disc opens with a stunning twelve-string driven reading of the Gibson and Shel Silverstein collaboration “Cindy Dreams Of California.” Gibson met Silverstein at the Gate Of Horn [during the early nineteen-sixties], although it was partner Bob Camp who first co-wrote with Shel. Their collaboration “The First Battalion” formed part of the “Civil War Trilogy” on “**Gibson And Camp At The Gate Of Horn.**”

There’s much not to say about Silverstein’s “I Never Got To Know Her Very Well” other than it’s a melodic heartfelt tale of love lost. Having mentioned that Bob’s guitar work on “Cindy Dreams Of California” is a revelation, on “Come On Back Baby [Lovesick Blues],” a Gibson/Silverstein co-write, he further displays the breadth of his technique. A happy-go-lucky number “Funky In The Country” is credited to Gibson and Terry Talbot. Back in the 1970’s Mason Proffitt, was a Chicago based country-rock band whose members eventually relocated to California. The band cut five albums, and was led by brothers Michael and Terry Talbot.

Tongue-in-cheek, biographical, Silverstein’s “The Living Legend” is spot on lyrically and opens with “*Hey mister can you use an old folk singer.*” Having lived the story that then unfolds, Bob vocally recalls the good times and the bad. One of Bob’s best known compositions “Abilene” is segued here with “2:19 Blues,” and later in this disc there’s a segue of “One And Only” / “Brownsville.” George Hamilton IV took “Abilene” to # 1 on the Country Singles Chart for four weeks during the summer of 1963, and, concurrently, on the Pop Singles Chart it peaked at # 15. The love themed “I Can’t Hide The Way,” penned by Gibson and Guy Guilbert, is melodically hook laden allowing Bob’s guitar playing to once again shine. Co-written with Bob Connelly, “Farewell Party” proved to be somewhat prophetic considering that, just over two decades later, such a musical event was held in Chicago approximately one week before Gibson passed. Gibson and the late Phil Ochs [d. 1976] wrote “That’s The Way It’s Gonna Be” during 1964. Ochs’ rendition of the song appeared on the Smithsonian Folkways compilation “**Broadside Tapes Vol. 1**” [1989].

Also a Mountain Railroad release “**Gibson & Camp: Homemade Music,**” was produced by the late Dick Rosmini [d. 1995] and recorded at his Los Angeles home. Rosmini [guitar] and Herb Brown [bass] had accompanied Gibson & Camp during their performance at the 1960 Newport Folk Festival. The only contributors to this long-time personal favourite are Bob Gibson [12 string guitar, vocals],

Bob Camp [6 string guitar, vocals] and Dick Rosmini [bass, percussion, mandolin, guitar, dobro, synthesizer, steel guitar].

There's something quite magical about the union of Gibson and Camp's voices, and their sophomore album finds them having fun making music. Once again Silverstein is very present in terms of the material featured, and the collection opens with his tune "Jimmie Rodgers," lyrically an exposition of American musicians, movie stars and sporting heroes, and is followed by the late Steve Goodman's [d. 1984] caution on excess [alcohol, love and more] "Lookin' For Trouble." Red-light ladies pass through the lines of husband and wife, Monte Dunn and Karen Cruz's, "Self-Satisfaction" and also the later "Fancy Ladies" a Gibson/Silverstein co-write. Featuring new words and music by Gibson [the vinyl album liner also credited Camp] "Dogies" is a cattle driving cowboy song. Bob moved to Mendocino, California – and fell in love with the location - during the early nineteen-seventies and "Dead On The Run," penned by Gibson/Silverstein, explores the *"..strange combination of dealers, hillbilly's, hookers and nuns, Old cattle rustlers, city street hustlers"* that he found residing there.

A deserted wife is the narrator in Bob's "Billy Come Home." Silverstein's waltz paced "Sing For The Song" has the feel of one of those *'come all ye'* folk sing-a-long numbers, but listen closely to Shel's lyric and you'll note that it cautions the listener regarding the 'extracurricular excesses' that a financially successful musician can be tempted by. Raised in Little Falls, New Jersey after living in various regions of the States, Michael Peter Smith settled in Chicago during the mid 1970's and eventually began working with Gibson, initially as his bass guitarist. When Smith performed "Spoon River" at Kerrville this year, the song brought this scribe to tears such is the completeness of this portrait of a simpler time. Smith's song catalogue is truly gem encrusted and "Spoon River" is a 24 carat creation, and here Camp takes the lead vocal. Douglas Clark Steiger the Utah bred author of the love themed "Light Up My Lady" is an Austin, Texas based musician these days. This collection closes with the Gibson penned album title song, a foot-tap inducing, up-tempo joyous tribute to, nay celebration of, making music.

Originally a Mountain Railroad release, Drive Entertainment Inc. released a CD version of **"The Perfect High"** during 1998. This live recording features performances at Charlotte's Web in Rockford, Illinois and Chicago's The Earl Of Old Town. A pair of Bob n' Shel's Mendocino tunes turn up on this collection. The tale of an unfortunate 'one night stand' "Just A Thing I Do [Kathy O'Grady's Song]" opens the collection, and midway through there's the riotously rib-tickling "Mendocino Desperados." The narrator in "Yes Mr. Rogers" addresses his [seemingly combative] prospective father-in-law, the bottom line being that the narrator's already living with the girl he plans to marry. The tune was penned by Silverstein and Chicago bred, Nashville based hit songwriter Fred Koller,

Gibson is joined by the crystal clear voice of Anne Hills on the love lament "Leaving For The Last Time," and on the ensuing "Army Of Children." The former song was co-written by Bob and Chicago based songbird Jo Mapes, while Gibson's collaborator on the latter was Irma Brown. "Rock Me Sweet Jesus" is a gospel tinged number, while, joined vocally by the audience, the "Heavenly Choir" lyric pays tribute to Josh White, Hank Williams and Janis Joplin - both songs being Gibson/Silverstein collaborations. "Cuckoo Again" and "Middle Aged Groupies," which follows, are humour laced Silverstein creations, while "Box Of Candy [And A Piece Of Fruit]," penned by Bob and Tom Paxton, is sung here by the duo. A narration, part tall tale, part template for life Shel's "Baba Fats [The Perfect High]" lists just about every possible stimulant known to man and closes with a sly wink.....

Founded circa 1982 in Chicago, and based out of the ever present Hogeye Music Folklore Centre, Hogeye Records released albums by Tom Paxton, Anne Hills [with Jan Burda], Bob Gibson, Andrew Calhoun and Cindy Mangsen and more. Bob's **"Uptown Saturday Night"** became the fifth release on the imprint, and production was credited to Anne Hills. During 1984/85 Messrs. Paxton, Gibson and Hills performed together as Best Of Friends.

"Let The Band Play Dixie" written by Gibson and Dave North, recalls President Lincoln's magnanimous 'musical' gesture to the defeated 'South' at the end the American Civil War. "Rest Of The Night" finds the narrator in this Gibson/Silverstein co-write express the hope that she'll *"stay for the rest of my life,"* while the amusing "Tequila Sheila" features a border-crossing, cross-dressing bandit. Penned by Silverstein and Lubbock born country music star Mac Davis, Bobby Bare live

rendition of "Tequila Sheila" reached # 31 on Country Singles Chart during the spring of 1980. Bob is joined by Anne on "And Lovin' You" a song he co-wrote with Tom Paxton. This gentle love song furnishes ample proof that less is more - male and female voices, plus Bob's finger-picked banjo and his mid-song whistling interlude simply make for perfection. Bob and Chicago based scriptwriter Marv David were commissioned by Parkside Medical Services to pen a song for a substance abuse documentary film and "Pilgrim" was the result.

Gibson's banjo features prominently on the album, and the self-explanatory album title track is one of those occasions, and is followed by the jazz tinged Gibson/Silverstein tune "Baby, If You Don't Know Now." **"Uptown Saturday Night"** closes with three Gibson originals. "Lookin' For The You" is a bittersweet paeon to the memory of an old love, while the narrator in "Tom Cattin' Time" yearns for female company, and the closing "Bein' On The Road" finds its narrator berating those musicians who pen 'oh woe is me' songs about the life of a touring musician.

I mentioned at the outset that **"The Living Legend Years"** compilation was enhanced by three previously unreleased cuts. Supported ably by his 12 string guitar Bob delivers the late Fred Neil [d. 2001] classic "Dolphins," while with production of the track credited to Bobby Bare "Smoke Dawson" not only name checks Mendocino but the lyric relates the antics of a legendary 'local' bagpipe player. Completing the trio of 'unreleased' tracks is a Gibson & Camp rendition of "What You Gonna Do About Love," penned by Antonia Lamb, a Mendocino based musician [and, I believe, local legend].

For me, musically speaking, there has only ever been one Bob! His name is Bob Gibson, and his legacy lives on.....

Arthur Wood.

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