



Lee Clayton – LIVE AT ROCKPALAST (Album Review) Repertoire Records

From the still utterly unique Lee Clayton this, at turns paint blistering then refined, live set was recorded during 1980 in Germany.

In 1968, aged 26, Lee Clayton relocated to Nashville to pursue a career in songwriting having, for the previous three years, served in the U.S. Air Force, in the main, flying the McDonnell RF101 Voodoo fighter plane – aka the Widow Maker. Clayton, christened William Shotts, hails from Alabama and had played guitar intermittently since the age of seven. He penned his first song while serving his country. Although not featured here, it was probably “Old Number Nine,” a commentary on an airplane that according to his lyric “once held the world speed record.”

Recorded at Hamburg’s Markthalle on 9th January 1980 and broadcast on the German tv show *Rockpalast*, Clayton (guitar, harmonica, vocals) is supported by the power trio of Philip Donnelly (guitar), Colin Cameron (bass) and Tony Newman (drums). The previous year saw Capitol Records release *Naked Child* the second of a trio of (incredibly consistent Lee Clayton) song collections for which, (at the time) in my 5 star album review I coined the term *heavy-metal country rock*. Needless to say, unlike *new country*, *alt country* and *Axxxxxxxa* that catchall for countless musical carpetbaggers, it failed to enjoy its time in the sun, principally due to no one following in the musical footsteps of this utterly unique performer and writer. Apart from a brief interlude in the opening half of the nineteen-nineties, and a 2008/2011 download only single, Clayton pretty much vanished from public view three decades ago.

In addition to reprising four of the eight selections from *Naked Child*, *Live At Rockpalast* delivers a handful from predecessor *Border Affair* (1978) and a pair from the, then yet-to-be-released, almost as sonically heavy *The Dream Goes On* (1981). Circa 1989 a live recording issued by the Dutch Provogue label reprised familiar material and was followed, a handful of years later, by the studio set *Spirit Of The Twilight*. Two songs from the later disc were performed that January day in the Markthalle, and from Lee’s self-titled 1973 debut this fifteen selection, fourteen song in-concert recording is completed by “Ladies Love Outlaws.” A 1972 interpretation of the latter song by the late Waylon Jennings subsequently spawned the *outlaw country* movement.

Clayton & Co. launch their Rockpalast performance with a rollicking interpretation of “Saturday Night Special” from *Naked Child*, and close by reprising it. The band only take their collective feet off the sonic accelerator for ballads such as “Rainbow In The Sky,” the ensuing bittersweet “My True Love” and later, the goose-bump inducing “If You Can Touch Her At All.” Supported by the rock solid backline of Cameron and Newman, Dublin bred Donnelly’s lead guitar work throughout is, frankly, jaw-dropping. It’s incandescent, volcanic even, on Clayton’s rockier songs. During the early seventies Philip accompanied Donovan to the States, and midway through the following decade became a fixture in Nanci Griffith’s Blue Moon Orchestra. Refined

is the word that comes to mind regarding his input to the Texan songbird's oeuvre, and here, at turns, Donnelly wears both hats, refined and raucous. From *Naked Child* the almost eight minute, "10,000 Years/Sexual Moon," long a personal favorite, is a revelation.

Released as a CD (75 mins. duation)/DVD (83 mins. duration) combination by Repertoire Records, this German imprints grasp of "*vorsprung technik*" is to be applauded, since the DVD content is rated Region 0 and can be played worldwide. Furthermore it can be viewed with Stereo or 5.1 Surround Sound accompaniment. The discs are housed in a three-way, fold-out card cover as is a sixteen-page liner booklet with notes by Tim Hinkley and new quotes from Clayton; a card, outer slipcase completes the package.

For longtime Lee Clayton fans this is an essential *live* insight into his song catalogue from a time when he was at his creative peak...for newcomers it's a perfect primer.

<http://www.repertoirerecords.com/artists/lee-clayton/lee-clayton-live-at-rockpalast/>

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