



Tift Merritt **"Tambourine"** Lost Highway Records

In the opening lines of the first cut "Stray Paper" North Carolina raised Merritt name checks her Gulf Coast birthplace, *"I got a postcard with an old address, A picture of Houston in a creased-up mess."* As the subsequent verses unfold, Merritt delivers memories of a *once upon a time* relationship – *"I've got to see you" on a bar napkin, Gas station quarters, I got to see you again* and *"Somewhere there's a letter that I never sent."* It's apparent from the get go that **"Tambourine"** is much harder edged than her 2002 debut **"Bramble Rose."** For openers Tift is *not* supported by her road band, The Carbines – well, Zeke Hutchins plays tom-toms on one cut. Instead, producer George Drakoulis has brought in a squad of heavy hitters including the guitars of Mike Campbell [Tom Petty] and solo recording artist Neal Casal, drummer Don Heffington [Lone Justice, Emmylou Harris], plus the voices of Gary Louris [The Jayhawks] and former co-lead vocalist in Lone Justice, Maria McKee.

The second cut "Wait It Out" co-written with producer/engineer/musician Jay Joyce [Patty Griffin, Abra Moore] is laden with shades of John Jennings [Mary Chapin Carpenter] twangy electric guitar figures, and "I Am Your Tambourine" – featuring the refrain *"Shake me with your love tonight"* - which appears toward the close of this disc, are the up-tempo out and out rockers. On "Ain't Looking Closely" there's some fine 12 string Rickenbacker lead guitar from long time guitar hero, Mike Campbell. Penned by McClinton Osbie Burnett aka coloured country singer O. B. McClinton [b. 1940, d. 1987] "Your Love Made A U-Turn" and Merritt's own "Good Hearted Man" could easily have been cut in Muscle Shoals or Motown, and feature The Texicali Horns and a soulful sounding girl choir that trades under the *nom de plume* of the Good Hearted Woman Singers. As for Tift's vocal performance, it's reminiscent of Dusty Springfield at her *Memphis* best.

"Laid A Highway," is a female reflection upon the passage of, and ravages of time, as well as a recollection of the better times that a *now terminal* old mill town enjoyed in decades gone by. This cut strays close to the fare that pervaded Merritt's **"Bramble Rose."** I can appreciate a *fun* lyric with the best of them, but it's hard to comprehend that the same person who wrote "Laid A Highway" came up with the brainless bimbo utterances delivered in the aforementioned "I Am Your Tambourine." As for the gospel/R & B closer, "Shadow In The Way," featuring the Abrahams Victory Voices Choir, there are shades of Jagger/Richards "Gimmie Shelter" in the melodic hook and rhyme scheme.

While folk/country **"Bramble Rose"** gained critical kudos it failed to ignite at the box office. With **"Tambourine,"** Tift has backtracked to the crossroads and started down a country/soul path, while vaguely retaining memories of the lyrical sensitivity that she displayed on her debut. The result is, sometimes derivative, occasionally entertaining.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

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