



Tim Harrison **"Wheatfield With Crows"** Second Avenue Records

As with his 1999 self-titled collection, on **"Wheatfield With Crows"** Harrison merges reinterpretations of previously recorded songs with new compositions. In this instance, seven selections are drawn from his 1995 *comeback* album **"The Stars Above,"** and equally balance the seven new songs.

Harrison relates in his liner notes that the album title track [*and reinterpretation*], which opens the disc, was written following a chance encounter while visiting his local supermarket. Video screens had been installed above the checkout tills to entertain the waiting customers. A quiz programme was running and one of the questions posed was *"What was Vincent Van Gogh's last painting?"* Tim went home and wrote the song, but relates that two weeks later the screens were gone in the wake of "plummeting" sales of magazines at the check out points. Subjectively, "Wheatfield With Crows" focuses on the boundless almost brazen innocence of youth, a time when it seems so very easy to believe that *anything* and *everything* in life can be achieved.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century thousands of orphans and young children, from destitute English families, were separated from their parents and siblings and without legal recourse, *literally*, deported to Canada. There, *ironically*, they became known as "Home Boys," although as Harrison points out young females were just as liable to be transported. In Canada, they were often exploited as cheap labour [mainly on farms], and in recent decades an attempt at reconciliation has taken place, relative to removal of the stigma of being a *home boy* or a descendent of one.

"Elizabeth's Lament," "Innocent Eyes" and "The Parting Letter To Ophelia" resurface here as a three song segue, and later in this collection, back to back, there's "Joy Alright," "Map Of Paris" and "The Stars Above." Set in New England during the fall, in "Elizabeth's Lament" a mature and disillusioned, married woman for whom the fire of first love has long dimmed and whose children have grown and are about to leave home, looks to the future and poses the question - *"Has my life served its purpose, or is there more to come?"* Being duped through your own naivety is the focus of "Innocent Eyes," while using the voice of the Prince of Denmark inspiration for "The Parting Letter To Ophelia" came from the Bard of Avon. Even when life seems desperate and you're [feeling] downtrodden, there's still good reason to feel positive and challenge whatever life throws at us is the theme of "Joy Alright." "Map Of Paris" is a hopeful love song that, lyrically, dreams of events taking place at numerous locations in the French capital, while here on Earth, and in Harrison's Ontario home in particular, "The Stars Above" are practically the only facet of life that has not been affected by the decisions politicians make.

Returning to Shakespeare, according to Tim, "Fortune And Men's Eyes," which follows "Ophelia," was jointly inspired by one of the bard's sonnets and Edgar Allan Poe's tale of youthful love lost, "Annabell Lee." Located centrally in this collection are two cover songs, "Song Of The Wandering Aengus" and "There But For Fortune" penned by scribes who, sadly, are no longer with us. The lyric to the former is a William Butler Yeats poem, which was set to music by the late Dave Van Ronk, whose acquaintance Harrison made back in the early nineteen eighties. Some forty years ago, Judy Collins covered Yeats work as "Golden Apples Of The Sun," and additionally a Richard Dyer-Bennett musical setting also exists. Harrison's version is an arrangement of Van Ronk's melody, while the lyric relates how the narrator, as a young man, once glimpsed perfection in female form. Now old, the narrator spent his subsequent life seeking just one more sacred sighting. Phil Ochs idealistic "There But For Fortune" dates from 1963, and is followed by a Harrison acoustic guitar instrumental "Watson Goes To The Park," a tribute to his young son's Bassett hound.

“Song Of Thanksgiving” and the closing cut, “Sea-fever,” are new songs. Based on its title, even in times of adversity, the lyric of the former song advocates that we should always allow time for *thanksgiving*, while employing John Masefield’s 1899 poem the latter title is a tribute to Tim’s father and his seafaring ancestors. Apart from Harrison’s acoustic guitar and voice, Tim is occasionally supported on this engaging *lo-fi* set by Celtic harp, accordion, harmonic and backing vocals.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

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