



Mark Erelli “**The Memorial Hall Recordings**” Signature Sounds Recording Company

For his third Signature Sounds album, while retaining the back-line of Jim Lamond [bass] and Lorne Entress [drums], Mark has come up with an atmospheric [multi-faceted] concept album. Adding their support are guitarists Kevin Barry and Jim Henry, vocalists Ben Demerath and Bruce MacKay, plus Joe Barbato on piano and accordion. Produced once more by Entress, the contents of this effort diverge from Mark’s previous outings in as much as only four Erelli penned originals are featured.

The first concept is that the remaining decade of songs have been penned by writers who [mostly] domicile themselves in America’s north-eastern states. The second relates to the fact that, back in 1988, the Cowboy Junkies came up with a minimalist recording approach on “**The Trinity Sessions**,” using one microphone and a non-recording studio space. In their case, the Church of The Holy Trinity, Toronto. Messrs Erelli and Entress have been somewhat more subtle and intuitive in their approach to that template. Their chosen venue, a hall, was constructed in the late nineteenth century, as a remembrance of the men of Monson, Massachusetts who fought in the Civil War. Taking a mere three and a half days to complete, Entress set up far more than a single microphone, while incorporating the approach of starting the tape machine in the morning and leaving it to run for the day.

In my opinion, the result amounts to seamless and timeless perfection. Two Erelli compositions “Call You Home” and “Goodbye” bookend the collection. The former is a paeon of deep and abiding affection for the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts where Mark lived a few years back – “*like a prodigal son no more to roam, will you let me once again call you home*” captures his heartfelt tribute. The closing selection, a gentle shuffle, relates the inevitable parting of a couple who, frankly, were “*plainly never suited*.” The Celestaphone [played by Entress] possesses a sound reminiscent of an *automated* hammered dulcimer, and underpins the, six-minute plus, second cut, Jim Armenti’s “Every Goodbye.” Lucy Kaplansky covered Armenti’s pop anthem “Down By The Water” on the Cry 3 disc. This Armenti original tells the tale of Walker Jermaine’s life of crime. Located in the mid-section of the disc there’s a trio of tunes that address Civil War issues. First up is the traditional tune “The Drinking Gourd,” a nickname for the star formation, Ursa Major [aka The Big Dipper], which Negro slaves used as a reference point to the North Star when attempting to escape from their owner. It’s followed by the traditional “Blue Eyed Boston Boy,” arranged by Entress, a sombre tale of death in battle, while on “Dear Magnolia” Barry’s electric guitar fills rise and fall in the best muted bottleneck tradition of David Lindley. Elsewhere on this disc there’s Bill Morrissey’s tender “Summer Night,” Erelli’s acoustic guitar/accordion driven instrumental lullaby “Little Torch,” while the eight-minute long “Ichabod” [meaning “inglorious” in Hebrew] melds John Greenleaf Whittier’s nineteenth century anti Fugitive Salve Act [*] poem with an Entress melody.

Apart from being a carefully chosen, extremely potent and *plainly suited* collection of songs, “**The Memorial Hall Recordings**” is chock full of those *moments* that you’ve just got to hear – over and over and over again. That blessed Celestaphone, Kevin Barry’s atmospheric instrumental “Guitar Interlude,” the haunting phrases of accordion, that sombre reed organ, the waltzes, the ballads, the up-tempo songs, that lullaby - hell, the whole darned thing end to end, and back again.

By way of footnote, and not that I’m putting further irresistible temptation in your path, the disc contains over six minutes of video presentation as a foretaste for a possible Erelli DVD release later this year.

NOTE.

[*] aka “The Compromise of 1850.”

P.S. While you're on the Signature Sounds site [www.signature-sounds.com], why don't you avail yourself of a copy of Mark's recently issued five track EP "**The Only Way**" which features his 9/11 song of the same name, as well as a previously unavailable Erelli rendition of Dylan's "With God On Our Side."

Folkwax Rating 10 out of 10 [only because I can't give eleven]

Arthur Wood
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[600 words]