

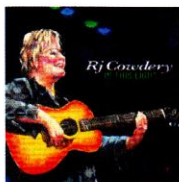
NEW RELEASES

Rj Cowdery IN THIS LIGHT

Blue Rock Artists

★★★★☆

Magnificent melodies and heartfelt emotions shimmer IN THIS LIGHT



Ohio native Rj Cowdery openly admits that she's something of a late bloomer. Holding down a real job for years and years, Rj released her debut album in the middle of the closing decade of last century and then settled back into the 'everyday' of every succeeding day. While music continued to pervade Rj's leisure hours, she finally cast her songs to their fate in the public domain a handful of years ago. Drawing on decades of knowledge, like a magnet Cowdery's words and melodies attracted accolades and songwriting awards from Mountain Stage NewSong Contest (2007), the Kerrville Folk Festival New Folk Song Contest (2008) and Wildflower! Music & Arts Festival Singer/Songwriter Contest (2011). Her third recording, *IN THIS LIGHT*, was recorded in 'paradise' aka Wimberley's Blue Rock Artist Ranch and Studio and produced by facility co-owner Billy Crockett. Chris Maresh (acoustic, electric bass) and Rick Richards (percussion) furnish the backbone on most of the album's eleven selections, and Rj's voice and acoustic guitar are also supported by hallmark contributions from Crockett (piano, pump organ, mandolin), Cindy Cashdollar (weisenborn, Dobro, lap steel, national steel, resonator guitar), Dirje Smith (cello), Pierce Pettis (harmonica) and Jonathan Byrd (vocals).

Magnificently mellifluous from the outset, Cowdery opens with the album title song. Having thrown 'some wishes' into a well, the narrator relates how she subsequently: 'ran like hell' because: 'I think I'm better off if I don't know.' There's a possible autobiographical undercurrent at play here, as the narrator subsequently relates: 'Threw down my guard step into the light.' The rest, I guess, is history as related in the opening paragraph of this review. Mankind's daily struggles are woven into the fabric of *Other Side Of Love* and *I'll Keep Trying*. *Blind Side* focuses on a cheating husband, while *Snow* is a seasonal road song set in a cold motel room and closes with the cinematic and succinct: 'Damn this winter get me June.' The narrator in *Far Away* paints a portrait of a hardscrabble life: 'All this living is surely killing me.' Assisted vocally by Byrd, in the five-minute plus *Not Going Home*, the narrator having been shot and 'lying in a pool of blood' reflects on someday spinning off this mortal coil: 'I don't see the light so I'm not going home.'

The latter title segues into a short reprise of the well-known gospel song *I'll Fly Away*. This is an eminently listenable collection that bears repeated hearing, and closes with the sonically bare caution *Whiskey*. Cowdery's voice and guitar are accompanied solely by Crockett's pump organ, the lyric being an 'open letter' to that warm yet seductive and addictive spirit in the bottle. **Arthur Wood**

www.rjcowdery.com

Rob Lytle YOU.MUST.STOP

Heart And Hope Music
HHM001

★★★★☆

A well-blended and well-produced album of superb country-folk music

Rob Lytle

You. Must.



This album arrived some time ago, completely out of the blue and I readily admit I put it to one side without giving it a second look and without having even a cursory listen. A big mistake on my part, but in my defence how was I to know that I'd more or less discarded the musical equivalent of an unknown Gainsborough? Eventually I dug it out of an expanding pile of CDs waiting to be reviewed, slipped it into the player and continued ploughing through even more emails and was stopped in my tracks by the opening song *Why They Play The Games*. The lively song beams with a folk-country style as the melodic lyric gives an in depth look into the lives of young players overcoming physical challenges to succeed in playing the game and also features some great harmonies by Karyn Oliver. I tried to return to those emails, but it was totally impossible as one superb song followed another. But it wasn't just the quality of the songwriting that impressed, there was Rob's warm and emotional voice, a cross between the late Steve Goodman and James Taylor. And then the final ingredient, inventive musical arrangements to die for with understated playing by the likes of producer Thomm Jutz (various guitars), Fats Kaplin (pedal steel, fiddle), Barry Walsh (piano, keyboards, accordion) and the solid rhythm of Mark Fain (bass) and John Gardner (drums, percussion). This is one of those all-too-rare albums where every track is a standout and also quite different to each other.

The lyrics are fun and creative on *Daddy Knows What Boys Want* and will have you singing along to this inviting tune and smiling broadly and knowingly at the well-observed warnings to a teenage daughter. Love songs don't come much finer than *Caitlyn* with Rob and Karyn sharing superb vocals as their expressions and

delivery of the thoughtful, well-written lyrics blend in wonderful uniformity with the ever-reliable Barry Walsh providing just-so piano notes unobtrusively in the background—pure magic. Rob steps sure-footedly into a traditional country style with *Love You As You Break My Heart* with fiddle, steel, electric lead and accordion blending perfectly over the neatly formed country-rock rhythm. Wow! And it just goes on and on. So much so that I never know from one minute to the next which is the best track or my personal favourite—suffice to say there's just a hue of fun and entertaining country songs on this terrific album.

Alan Cackett

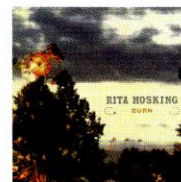
www.roblytle.com

Rita Hosking BURN

Independent RH-004

★★★★

Heartfelt country soul set from someone who's quietly become one of the best



Saying an album is easy on the ear is often to damn with faint praise but in the case of singer-songwriter Rita Hosking's fourth outing it's absolutely not. Rather it's a reflection of a wonderful voice, superb accompaniment and a great set of songs. With a voice pitched somewhere between the passionate naivety of Iris Dement and the soulful sound of Patsy Cline she strikes straight to the heart from the opening notes of *Something You Got* and stays there long after the last notes of album closer *Song For Claire* have faded away.

Hosking has real depth to her songs. *Crash And Burn*'s story of a female demolition derby racer coming to terms with the fact that the crowd want fire and possibly even death and don't care who wins, nails a rather less pleasant side of the human psyche, while *Ballad For The Gulf Of Mexico* tackles the Gulf oil spill head on without pulling a single punch. Hosking is descended from emigrant Cornish miners, something she tells of in *When Miners Sang*, a song that pulls at the heartstrings of this Kernow man. On the personal side, the righteous passion of *How Many Fires* and the heavily symbolic *Dishes* are excellent but *Song For Claire*, a quiet piece written for an 80-year-old lady, is perhaps the standout with its reflections on the wisdom acquired from a life well-lived.

Hosking is a real talent, and sits up alongside Nanci Griffith as someone who understands the human heart and can touch it every single time.

Jeremy Searle

www.ritahosking.com