



Blaze Foley “Oval Room” Lost Art Records

I guess you could say that “**Oval Room**” is the *younger sibling* of “**Live At The Austin Outhouse**” which the Austin, Texas based Lost Arts label issued on CD back in 1999. Blaze Foley was shot dead during a family altercation on 1st February 1989, and the sessions for this new recording and its predecessor had taken place some five weeks earlier, at Austin’s Outhouse [on 27th/28th December 1988]. In the summer after Foley passed, a twenty-one track cassette “**Live At The Austin Outhouse (.....And Not There)**” based on those Xmas Week ’88 sessions was issued by Outhouse Records. Recorded by Lost John Castner, it was the source for the 1999 CD and “**Oval Room**.” It’s a testament to Castner’s tenacity and belief in Foley’s music that, fifteen years after the musician’s passing, he remains a stalwart standard bearer. Not that John is the only Austin resident dedicated to preserving Foley’s history. Kevin Triplett is currently conducting the final interviews and seeking finishing funds for a documentary he has put together on the musician’s life.

OK time to see how the numbers work folks. The ’89 cassette featured twenty-one songs, and twelve of them appeared on the ’99 CD. This new CD contains two narrative tracks and sixteen songs, which means – yes folks, the remaining songs from those two heaven-sent nights as well as material never previously released in the public domain is featured here.

What I must say at the outset is that it is appropriate/curious/spooky [all of the latter] that this *old* recording should surface at this particular time in world history. Maybe, I mean this planet’s political history. “Springtime In Uganda” is the tale of a sordid tyrant [*] who thankfully fell from grace, while “WW III” is an *ever present possibility* in these troubled times. At the outset of the latter cut, Foley notes that he’s seen a lot of adverts for joining the army recently, and although historically speaking the lyric [specifically] name checks Russia and Cuba, he goes on to paint a gung-ho *tongue in cheek* portrait of Uncle Sam, the warring nation - “*Let’s break out submarines, Blow some place to smithereens*” and more pertinently “*If you don’t know who to get first, You can’t figure whose the worst, Why not blow ‘em both away, They’ll be careful what they say.*” Despite the impression given by the song title, the ninety-second long, at times *cartoon like* “Wouldn’t That Be Nice” presents some street life *possibilities* [of course, circa 1988] including car jacking, various acts of physical violence, robbery, kidnapping, sexual acts and more. Foley’s point being, just because a *street person* isn’t well dressed [like you], doesn’t necessarily mean he’s going to harm you. Fact is, *nice*, in any context, is one of the nastiest four letter words in the English language.

On the short first track, “Introduction,” Blaze can be heard intimating “*This is called “Oval Room” and when Bush gets into office, I’ll just leave that one verse.*” Of course we’re speaking about Bush the Elder here [+], as opposed to Dubya. “Oval Room,” the cut in question, is the portrait of the *good life* a VIP – “*He’s the president but I don’t care.*”

Most of Blaze’s love songs, subjectively, point to an edgy situation between the male and female combatants and include “My Reasons Why,” the Appalachian folk flavoured “Cold Cold World” on which he’s accompanied the voice of Pat Mears, and the mournful yet touchingly beautiful “For Anything Less.” I only became aware of Foley’s music after a friend gave me a copy of the 1989 cassette during that year’s Kerrville Folk Festival. It’s my understanding that Blaze was a rough-hewn character, and yet he undoubtedly possessed the soul of a poet, as “Rainbows And Ridges” attests. *Figuratively speaking* a synopsis of the latter song would be, in this life, you have to traverse mountains to attain riches. The line

"If everything passes, what past will remain" is the clincher for me. "Blaze Foley's 113th Wet Dream" is a Dylanesque little number that treads lyrically through some strange situations, "Down Here Where I Am" is a road as well as a love song, while "Big Cheeseburgers And Good French Fries" proves to be a goodtime sing-along A1 rib tickler. Foley closes the album with the bluesy "Long Gone."

This sixty minute long recording, produced by Gurf Morlix [#] and Lost John, includes tracks *precisely as they were recorded* back in '88, and a few that have been enhanced by recent overdubbed contributions from Foley' friends. In terms of the former, the late Champ Hood's fiddle is well to the fore on "Lovin' You," while "Someday" includes a recently recorded support vocal by The Texana Dames.

Note.

[*] – Deposed in 1979, Idi Amin died 2003 in exile in Saudi Arabia.

[+] - He'd been elected a few months earlier.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 11/04