



Andrew Calhoun "**Tiger Tattoo**" Waterbug Records

There's a distinctly melancholic edge to Calhoun's voice, and his melodies are most definitely informed by Anglo-Celtic influences, yet his lyrics are far from negative and despairing diatribes. Truth to tell, they tend toward poetic evocations of this journey we call *life*. And, with some personal effort, the rich pilgrimage that we can turn it into.

The album opens with "Joy" – a tribute to Andrew's mother, who happens to be named, Joy. Joining Calhoun, on this effervescent and harmony rich song, are the voices of Claire Bard, Tracy Grammer, and the late Dave Carter, who also created the vocal arrangement. If there is a *real life connection* about the opening cut, then the four songs that follow, all written by Calhoun during the past year, provide insight into his early life. Set in Long Branch, New Jersey "Catching On Fire" finds Andrew, aged 6, heating some milk on the stove for hot cocoa. When his sleeve catches fire "*never before had such shrieking come from me,*" he seeks help by "*leaping down three flights slapping the flames out, never before had dad hit me like that.*" Crazy old "Miss Hill" who taught fifth grade, had a reputation as the "*second meanest teacher at the West End School.*" When she reduces the *new kid* in the class to tears and then ridicules him in front of his peers, Andrew and a chum decide on their own brand of justice. The lines "*There's a first time for everything and so it came to pass, That Miss Hill said "I'm sorry" in front of our whole class*" confirming the result of their efforts. At the age of thirteen Andrew witnessed a, then, mailman, John Prine, perform in a Chicago club. "*I got a stamp on the back of my hand and I saw my destiny.*" "Goin' Down To See John Prine" recalls the period when the singer/songwriter performed in local obscurity and then rose to national fame, and reflects upon the character change that *fame* brought. The final song in the quartet, "Fred's Brother," recalls Andrew's *happy memories* of high school free periods and drinking tea at a chum's house, and of that chums male sibling who had a "*rare affliction.*" The lyric goes on to describe the events that unfolded, later, at the wedding of Fred's brother, an event at which Andrew was invited to sing.

Calhoun penned "Day In And Night Out" in 1978, when he turned 21. A love song, it's performed here as a duet with Claire Bard. The latter lyric, curiously, includes the line – "*to see everything that the waterbug sees*" – and presaged the creation of Andrew's label, Waterbug Records, by almost a decade and a half. "Tom Brown" recalls a man who left his wife and two young boys for another woman only to eventually return home. The title track is based on the story of a woman, Amy, "*a weary woman of twenty-three,*" that Andrew met while undertaking some temporary work in a mailroom a few years ago. A white tiger was tattooed on her calf.

According to Calhoun's web site, his next recording project may very well be an album of traditional Scottish songs. Since the lyrics to those songs were originally penned in numerous local Scottish dialects, Andrew intends to make them more accessible to the listener through translation. By way of a taster [for that project], here, Andrew performs "I'm A Rover." The closing pair of songs, respectively "I Shall Not Look Away" and "Everyone Sang," are a tribute to Andrew's *song brother* who passed on July 19th 2002. The latter is a setting, with Andrew's music, of a poem by World War I British poet, Siegfried Sasson. The vocal and instrumental sounds of Carter and his partner, Tracy Grammer, can be heard on a significant percentage of this collection. On this plane, words are all we have to convey the sense of loss that we feel at the passing of someone we knew [and loved]. In "I Shall Not Look Away" Calhoun's words are concise, elegant, heartfelt and touching. Although I was not present at Dave Carter's memorial service held in Cathedral Park, Portland, Oregon, I have the feeling that "Everyone Sang" is Calhoun's attempt to recreate

the *uplifting spirit* that undoubtedly pervaded the event. My fervent hope, in words of the closing line - "*the singing will never be done*" – is that Carter's [and for that matter Calhoun's] melodies and words will *live on* in the public domain forever. Heaven knows it deserves to, since "**Tiger Tattoo**" is a treasure chest brim full of riches.

Folkwax Rating 9 out of 10

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