



Eddi Reader **"Peacetime"** Compass Records

Last time around Robert Burns, the eighteenth century Scottish poet, was unquestionably Eddi's poster boy. John Douglas' song "Wild Mountainside" apart, Rab, who in his day was something of a raunchy romantic, penned all the lyrics. In addition the latter collection, produced by Eddi's long time collaborator Boo Hewerdine, benefited from Aberdonian Kevin McCrae's inspired string arrangements. Sadly McCrae perished in a rail accident during 2005, and Reader dedicates this collection to his memory and that of *"....Marion McPhee and my Aunty Mary. I miss you."*

Four years on from **"Sings The Songs Of Robert Burns"** fellow Scot and fiddler extraordinaire John McCusker undertakes Boo's production role, and the recording sessions mainly took place at Pure Records Studio in Barnsley, Yorkshire. There is however nary a sign of McCusker's wife, Kate [Rusby]. Throughout Eddi Reader is supported by her 'time-served' crew of Boo Hewerdine [guitar], Ian Carr [guitar], Roy Dodds [drums, percussion] and Ewan Vernal [double bass], plus there are contributions from a number of well-known folk/roots players including Michael McGoldrick [whistles, flute, bagpipes], Phil Cunningham [accordion], Andy Cutting [accordion] and Alison Brown [banjo].

Compared to the U.K. Rough Trade Records release, the Stateside Compass Records version closes with a bonus track, "Ontario," more of which later. Disregarding the Burns theme, smidgens of his work resurface here, in terms of approach Reader's 2003 recording explored the folk side of her musical persona. That journey truly continues apace on **"Peacetime"** with only three of the tracks featuring a string section. It's something of a folk tradition to pair a song with a tune, and "Baron's Heir"/"Sadenia's Air" launches **"Peacetime."** In terms of storyline the former traditional arranged number, c/w string support, finds the low born narrator express at the outset *"O gin I were a baron's heir"* and later voice the deep felt desire *"Oh, laddie would you love me."* The McCusker penned air follows, and title phonetics apart – sic. heir/air - the connection is, of course, that Eddi was christened Sadenia.

Boo Hewerdine songs have been a 'shoe in' for some time on Reader's recordings, although it's noticeable that the Cambridge [England] bred lad is the only non-Celtic contemporary composer featured here. Boo's first effort "Muddy Water" focuses on an illicit encounter, the female protagonist being a married mother. "Safe As Houses," co-written with Reader, is a 'powerful piece of social commentary' inspired by the events of 07/07/05 on this side of the Atlantic. On that black, black day as Eddi's liner note relates *".....those young British men went into London to kill and hurt people."* Triggered by what occurred that day, the lyric attests that love can and will overcome hate. As for the song's opening verse image *"To take you kite shopping, In Neil's yard"* – I found myself thinking of Boo's classic song "Kiteflyer's Hill" and of his collaborator Neil MacColl - it's not unknown for a writer to slip some personal acknowledgement into a lyric. Hewerdine's album title track 'closed' the U.K. version of the album. Supported by an insistent cyclical guitar riff, for three and a half verses Reader delivers images of pastoral beauty and the delights humankind is free to share when no wars are being fought. The real message, however, is contained in the repeated closing words *"No hearts undone, no mother's ache, For those left behind, In peacetime."* As for the aforementioned "Ontario," penned by Boo, it appeared on his 2006 solo album **"Harmonograph."** Once upon a time people from these islands [United Kingdom] emigrated to North America in droves and at the outset the narrator, back home in the old country, relates *"A package found, It's way here today, All the way from Ontario, So we go on about our lives, Under other London skies,"* goes on to add *"You went away, To be someone new, All the way to Ontario,"* but it's the subsequent *"There are those who can not stay, I'll come and visit you there one day"* that truly tugs at the heartstrings because we know, too well, that some of life's plans go unfulfilled.

Other traditional fare on “**Peacetime**” includes “Mary And The Soldier” – Reader’s female characters are usually strong women, and on this occasion Mary doesn’t allow her man to get away - and “The Calton Weaver [Nancy Whiskey].” “The Calton Weaver” is ostensibly a hidden track on the U.K. release, unlisted on the liner it follows Hewerdine’s “Peacetime,” while it’s clearly listed on the Compass version. Either way, Eddi’s rendition amounts to an energetic knees-up. Moving on to Rabbie’s contributions, “Ye Banks And Braes O’ Bonnie Doon” is probably his best known selection, while the waltz paced “Leezie Lindsay” featuring Burns’ chorus paired with Reader/Hewerdine penned verses that have been constructed around the theme of deserting the clamour of the city for a quiet rural retreat. Finally, in “Aye Waukin-O” the smitten narrator relates how bedevilled by thoughts of her true love, sleep won’t come.

I’ve already mentioned his “Wild Mountainside,” and John Douglas contributes three songs on this occasion. Eddi’s brother Francis is the vocalist in the Trashcan Sinatras, a band of musical Scots that also features Douglas. Before I look at each Douglas song in detail, I have to say they all possess a subtle spiritual undercurrent. We humans often create our own “Prisons,” thankfully some of us manage to escape and make a better life for ourselves and those dear to us. “The Shepherd’s Song” melody is traditional, while the words that accompany it were penned by Reader/Douglas. [Well worth reading] Reader’s liner note of serendipitous connections apart, this track on first hearing simply ripped my heart out. Maybe it’s a British thing but employing a five-piece brass section backdrop is inspirational, while Reader vocally portrays a snow-covered landscape where a shepherd tends his flock. Finally, Douglas’ “Should I Pray?” poses spot on questions concerning faith, doubt and the hereafter. Penned by Ayrshire [Scotland] bred songwriter John Dillon, leader of the band Heirloom, “The Afton” is a song of praise to the river that flows through the county in which Dillon makes his home. Dublin born Declan O’Rourke’s debut album “**Since Kyabram**” sold double platinum in Ireland and midway through last year it gained a U.K. release. In “Galileo [Someone Like You]” O’Rourke has created a lyric that works on two levels. A conversational love song, it also poses ‘really big’ questions regarding the creation of the universe. Someone once asked [albeit in a movie], “*Is this heaven?*” and drew the reply “*No, it’s Iowa.*” I guess heaven is where you find it, and paraphrasing O’Rourke let me “....*thank the guy, Who put the rainbows in the sky.*”

What can I say, Eddi Reader possesses a truly adaptable singing voice and the multi-hued, solo musical trip that has taken her from “**Mirmama**” to “**Peacetime**” has been a joy to follow. Lang may it continue.....

Folkwax Score 10 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 01/07 & 02/07.