



Kathleen Edwards **"Failer"** Rounder/Philo Records

Kathleen Edwards self-released **"Failer"** in her native Canada early last year, and now it's a U.S. release, via Rounder Records *rock* label, Zoe. Edwards has been touted in some circles as a Lucinda *soundalike*. That being the case, no one, *but no one* sounds like Lucinda. What's more, based on the evidence presented here, Kathleen's melodies may *drone* a little at times, but she certainly does not *overtly mumble* her words, so the Williams analogy is *dead in the water*.

I can't attest historically for Edwards state of mind, or even what it was when this collection of ten originals was being cut, but **"Failer"** hardly seems like the most upbeat title with which to launch a solo recording career. From an alternate point of view, setting out as a **"Failer"** [#] could mean that everything from here on in is up. We'll see.....

I'm always curious as to how performers arrive at a name for their song publishing company. It often says a lot about the artist / scribe as a person – humorous, serious, genuine etc. For instance, Compass Records co-boss, Alison Brown, definitely scores a 10 in my book with Brown Knows Music. Kathleen Edwards' songs are assigned to Potty Mouth Music. Seems that this *daughter of Ottawa* may, at least, have adopted Lucinda's attitude. But has she got her musical balls and lyrical depth? [S]

The support players include guitarist/backing vocalist Jim Bryson who released an album in 1999 titled **"The Occasionals,"** which also featured drummer Peter von Althen and pedal steel player Tom Thompson. Althen contributes to five cuts on Edwards debut, and Thompson to two. **"Failer"** was recorded at Dave Draves Ottawa studio Little Bullhorn Productions, and Edwards and Draves co-produced the sessions.

Now we're down to the wire and the ten Edwards penned originals. Overall, the disc is moulded in that *sloppy* format that some scribe dubbed *alt. country* a few years back. A few of Kathleen's works possess an actual melody, while true to the genre some tunes just plain drone on.....and on and on. As for her lyrics, well, let's start with the opening cut "Six O'Clock News." Anyone who delivers a story song more often than not gets my undivided attention, and this cut is definitely one of those. It opens with a police stand off, and the narrator watches helplessly as her *sweet baby* Peter, who is armed and whose child she is carrying, is eventually gunned down. *"Did you loose your head when the farm went down, Or was it when your daddy died after you moved to town,"* presents the listener with some background to the events that have unfolded. All in all, I'm left unmoved. Pete's mum thought he was a loser. OK, failer.

With "One More Song The Radio Won't Like" we arrive in guitar drone territory. When Edwards wrote the song, she was undoubtedly indulging in pointed sarcasm. There are two sides to the main character, Johnny Little Rocket Star. There's the *"fashion labels, credit card"* and the fact that he's a celebrity - *"his name is at the door,"* but there's also the girlfriend who is a *"test of his sanity"* with *"bad debts and dirty laundry"* plus *"no one likes a girl who won't sober up."* If you sense from the foregoing that, lyrically, the song *drags* on and on, then you have drawn the same conclusion as me. Just because it is meaningless, does not mean that it's art.....

By the time “Westby” opens the act of illicit sex by a teenager and an older man, in a motel room, is a done deal. Wave upon wave of *subtle* [\$] lines such as “*my hands are covered with your smell,*” “*If you weren’t so old I’d tell my friends*” and “*But I don’t think your wife would like my friends*” are delivered, vocally, with venom, wild abandon and a pinch of anger. Sonically “Maria,” a song about a break-up, is underpinned for the most part by a thrashing electric guitar, while “National Steel,” which follows, is a gentler acoustic guitar, steel ‘n’ fiddle shuffle. Just as the song lulls you into an almost somnolent state, out of nowhere, Edwards delivers the “*f*” word – no, mother she didn’t say “*failing*.”

An *in your face* girl throws down a gauntlet to the male population in “Hockey Skates,” “Mercury” opens with the line “*Wanna go get high,*” while the sonically stripped down closer “Sweet Little Duck,” complete with Kathleen’s attempt at ethereal vocal, attempts to recall long lost innocence. Sadly, “**Failor**” equates to ten songs that literally merge, one into another, with no real definition or an invitation that screams “*listen to me, I’m the different one.*” What do I say now ? Was I meant to be impressed? Subjectively, I’d guess *bottom feeders* should find the song lyrics highly entertaining, stimulating even. As you can tell, this has not been my brand of poison.

Note.

[#] – “failor” features in the lyric of the opening cut “Six O’Clock News”

[\$] – irony.

Folkwax Rating 5 out of 10

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 02/03 & 03/03