



Louis Ledford **"Reverie"** Waterbug Records

It took me a couple of go-rounds before I figured out that Louis Ledford, vocally, sounded like one of California's finest Joel Rafael, and on other occasions there's a hint of young Jack Hardy, with his cowboy hat firmly in place. I guess the foregoing allusions establish the fact that there's a resigned, melancholic feel to the lyrics of this Richmond, Virginia based song poet.

A pair of acoustic guitars, a clearly audible mandolin, the constant thwack of the double bass, plus muted drums and percussion amount to the instruments that dispense the melody on the opening "All Of My Dreams/Most of The Time." Set in autumn, it's a meditation on the passage of a day in the life of the narrator and his hometown. As the song opens the *"sunlight bends softly"* and the narrator awakes from *"another moonless night."* Elsewhere, there's a poetic reference to one's mind being stolen by the sound of the "scraping" wheels of a passing freight train as it crosses an old wooden trestle, while Ledford's location is geographically pinpointed by *"Tobacco hangs in the air, like clothes on a line."* Employing the same instrumentation as the opening cut, in the up-tempo "Make It Home" Louis takes on the persona of a soldier, far from home, who explores comradeship in the face of adversity - *"And remember as long as we're together, you are not alone, So stay alert, do as I say you'll be OK, And we will make it home."* One hundred and forty years ago, the American nation literally tore itself apart by indulging in war, and "Belle Isle" relates, in the first person, the story of a Union soldier captured at Harper's Ferry - *"It seems so long ago"* - whose life ebbs away while incarcerated on the island. Belle Isle lies in the James River just west of Richmond. Ledford based his lyric on the diary of a Union soldier, Jacob Osborne Coburn, who reflects, as his end approaches *"I hope my time here was not wasted."*

A jaunty mandolin supports Ledford's vocal and acoustic guitar on the love [in crisis] song "Are You Listening," while in "Lonesome Road" at the outset the world weary, down on his luck, narrator mentions *"Just three cars stopped here today, One for gas, two for direction"* and goes on to recall crucial episodes in his life. Possessing a rockabilly feel at the outset, "Maury Street Cemetery," a real location in Richmond, eventually settles into a loose jazzy shuffle. Opening with a harmonica refrain "Lately" is a blues tune that features the repeated line *"This crack cocaine just suits me fine"* and, later, the lowlife narrator reveals that he has murdered a man - *"I wish he hadn't tried to fight, If he'd just done what I told him to, I would not have taken his life,"* while "Strange Dangerous Flower" is a pleasantly oddball love song.

According to the liner booklet, Louis penned "September" soon after playing a show in New York City on 21st September 2001. At almost eight and a half minutes duration, [the six minute plus "Belle Isle" apart] it's by far the longest cut on **"Reverie."** In terms of content it amounts to a series of observations Ledford made as he drove North and during his time in New York City. No blame is apportioned or finger pointed for the cataclysm of 9/11, "September" is simply one man's [closely observed] diary. The song opens with mention of snow lingering on the ground [in Virginia], and accompanied by his wife and young child, Ledford goes on to trace a series of extraordinary events in what would, in normal circumstances, have been another mundane road trip. There's mention of, singing a dusty old Woody Guthrie ballad, how, just across the Hudson River you could "almost feel the heat," singing songs "about loss and redemption" at the concert, meeting weary firemen mourning lost friends and comrades, seeing *"a mass of white smoke rising up into the darkness"* from a Brooklyn rooftop at night-time and, the following day, making an emotion filled visit to Ground Zero. Truth to tell, Ledford's "September" is easily the equal of Mark Erelli's 9/11 classic "The Only Way."

Arthur Wood.
Kerrville Kronikles 12/05.