



Michael Peter Smith **"Anthology One"** EMI Canada Records

Tom Russell and I share a connection. Our favourite song is Michael Smith's "The Dutchman" which Russell included on his 2003 album **"Modern Art."** Not only that, a couple of years earlier, Russell referenced Smith's composition in "The Road It Gives, The Road It Takes Away," one of only a few tunes Tom co-wrote with guitarist Andy Hardin. The reason I mention this, is that Smith first recorded "The Dutchman" thirty-six years ago on the trio album **"Juarez."** "The Dutchman" appears again on the Canadian release **"Anthology One,"** the eighth occasion, live or studio that Smith has included it on one of his, to date, seventeen solo/duo/band releases [*]. Compounding the issue is the fact that his most recent trio of solo releases [2 live [2003]/1 studio [2005]], plus **"Just Plain Folks"** [2005] with John McDermott, have all featured the song. "The Dutchman" is only one of many, many truly wonderful songs that Michael has penned, but this ceaseless repetition has become o-v-e-r-k-i-l-l.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Modern English defines the noun *"anthology"* as a *'choice collection of passages from literature (esp. poems), songs, paintings etc.'* Meanwhile the Oxford Thesaurus offers the substitutes *'compendium,' 'compilation'* and *'treasury.'* Given the album title I don't believe I'm a million miles off when I state that there was an expectation that **"Anthology One"** would contain only old material. In truth it's a mix of 'familiar' songs and ones that are making their debut in the public domain. Conclusion, the collection title seems curious.

Following an almost decade long silence, Smith re-ignited his recording career with the Anne Hills produced albums **"Michael Smith"** and **"Love Songs."** The sessions for the latter pairing took place at Dr Caw in Northbrook [Illinois], and two decades later the ten-track **"Anthology One"** was recorded there. Sadly the liner booklet fails to inform us of the names of the support players – musicians and backing vocalists. You see there's a number of band arranged cuts, for instance "What's The Sea Done To The Sailor," "Panther In Michigan" and more. Michael is an accomplished guitarist, and there is some rather tasty string work on this album, but were other guitarists involved in the **"Anthology One"** sessions? Whatever, the non-appearance of those details is an annoying omission.

In addition to "The Dutchman," five other songs qualify for the accolade 'familiar.' The western themed "Blazin' Guns" recalls a duel in the Tucson sun and appeared on **"Mickey & Babs Get Hot"** [1974], the first sighting of a "Panther In Michigan" was on **"Michael Smith"** [1986] while the jolly rhythmic tribute to ole Tut "Dead Egyptian Blues" appeared on **"Love Stories"** [1987]. A couple of Smith's recordings have appeared on the Wind River label, and Chicago based label-mates Small Potatoes [+] included Smith's richly melodic love song "Keep Me In Mind" on their album **"Waltz Of The Wallflowers"** [2000]. The latter is the only co-write in this collection, and is credited to Michael and his vocalist wife Barbara Barrow. Barbara included the nautically themed "Portland Fancy" on her self-release **"Woman In The Mirror"** [1998].

The foregoing apart, we're left with four new Michael Smith songs. "Fun House," the album opener, allows the listener to accompany a young couple on an event filled visit to the fairground. It's followed by "What's The Sea Done To The Sailor" and while the lyric poses many questions it also offers a few personal insights. The most pertinent example being, *"Love is still a mystery in this sailor's eye."* Women have consistently appeared in Smith song titles – for example, Elizabeth Dark, Crazy Mary, Donna from Mobile, and Melanie. On this occasion it's a "Portrait Of Isabel." We're informed, at the outset, that *"It's an old old house,"* in this reflection on past memories ghostly figures appear and disappear as the lines

and verses unfold. The latter lyric is predicated on the adage '*from dust we come and to dust we must return.*' Michael was born in Central New Jersey and raised in the north of the state. Down on the Jersey shore there's the resort of Lavallette. Pursuing the nautical theme of other songs in this collection, in the [childhood?] fantasy "Lavallette," Smith relates the tale of two sisters, Jeanmarie and Victoria, replete with reference to castles, pirates, kings, queens and a prince.

Gripes apart, this is a Michael Smith album and that's always something to savour. It's worth noting that the full title of this recording is "**Anthology One.**" More is planned?

Note.

[*] – I'm discounting Smith's "**Pasiones**" and the "**Weavermania Live!**" album, since the material featured, in both instances, was, respectively, mostly or totally written by others.

[+] – The boy/girl duo Small Potatoes is composed of Jacquie Manning and Rich Prezioso.

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 08/06.