



Ray Wylie Hubbard “**Eternal and Lowdown**” Rounder/Philo Records

I suppose there has always been a bluesy edge to Hubbard's work - after all, his *wilderness years* saw him work extensively with Bugs Henderson in North Texas - it's just that the aforementioned edge was less obvious until the arrival of Gurf Morlix in the producer's chair. This is their first collaboration. As if to reinforce the Robert Johnson ethic of *"going down to the crossroads"* that inspirational location, respectively, appears in "Sugar Cane" and "Didn't Have A Prayer." As for the devil and the Lord [aka God], lyrically, both characters are liberally spread throughout this work. Seven years on from "**Loco Grrongo's Lament**," the recording that catapulted Ray Wylie from the legion of Texas musicians who have become "footnotes," to being one of its acknowledged "leaders," the ensuing quartet of albums have, in my opinion, witnessed a consolidation of his skill as a songwriter. "**Eternal & Lowdown**" is another stop on a well-trodden path, wherein he leavens portions of truth and emotion with his own brand of sly humor. Infact he reprises "Didn't Have A Prayer" from the "**Loco....**" disc. On the slow burning "Night Time," Hubbard deliberately [and predictably] name checks Morlix. When the previous line ends with, *"some greasy guitar licks"* what else could follow? "Joyride" is a 160-second long, whimsical encounter with a young woman who exhibits *"rebellion and truth."* Introducing the saga with the line *"Understand I was not lookin' whereby to fall in love,"* Ray finds the time and space in the song to mention Austin's Continental Club, 1950's movie icon Mamie Van Doren, an old Camaro, Doug Sham's hit "Mendecino" and the blues player, Slim Harpo. Hubbard hasn't totally deserted those country licks however, as the intro to the traditional "Black Dog" attests. The latter tune skips along at almost a bluegrass pace. As for this year's most used folk word, "revelator" is becoming a strong contender. The title of Gillian Welch's new album is "**Time (The Revelator)**" and Hubbard employs the term in "Weevils." You have to wait until the closing cut to uncover the shining gem in this latest grab bag. "After All These Years" finds Ray in a reflective mood, as he expresses and seeks forgiveness for past transgressions. With some slippin' n' slidin', Hubbard has further reinforced his canon.

Folkwax Score 5 out of 10

**Arthur Wood.**

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