



Joel Rafael “**Thirteen Stories High**” Inside Recordings

Recorded at Cedar Creek Studio in Austin, Texas and produced by Rafael, the Southern Californian based musician is supported throughout “**Thirteen Stories High**” by members of Jimmy LaFave’s band – John Inmon [guitar], Wally Doggett [drums], Glenn Schuetz [bass] and – the Croatian Sensation - Radoslov Lorkovic [keyboards, accordion]. “America Come Home,” on his debut recording “**The Joel Rafael Band**” [1994], found Joel journey across his homeland bearing witness to the nation’s legion of homeless and more. Where the latter took the form of a prayer for reconciliation, “This Is My Country,” the opening track on “**Thirteen Stories High**,” finds Joel rails angrily at recent wars sparked by the nation’s leaders “...*this hungry pack of wolves, They have tasted the blood of the masses.*” As the verses unfold, Rafael alludes to Homeland Security as “*one of their alibis,*” and to a nation living in “*a state of fear*” while the chorus amounts to a call for change and the onset of sanity - “*It’s time to stop them in their tracks, it’s time to take our country back*” and Joel drives home his point with “*Put their ideas in a sack, cycle for redemption, It’s time to show them to the door, they won’t be needed anymore, Tell them there will be no more war based upon pre-emption.*”

Easing off on ‘the message accelerator’ for a moment – well, for one song at least – the second cut “Ball & Chain” is a clever, image filled love song wherein, for instance, the narrator states that he doesn’t want to be an “*anchor on your boat*” but rather a “*lighthouse shining bright,*” and later “*shelter from the raging storm*” rather than “*a prison cell.*” “Rich Man’s War” appeared on Steve Earle’s Best Contemporary Folk Grammy winning album “**Revolution Starts Now**” [2004] and a deal of irony pervades the character rich storyline. Jimmy, a “*poor boy,*” joined the U.S. Army in the hope of learning a trade and seeing the world, but ended up having to “*fight a rich man’s war*” in Baghdad. Then there’s Bobby who left behind a young wife, baby girl and “...*a stack of overdue bills, And went off to save the world*” in Afghanistan. In that foreign land he pursues “...*ghosts into thin dry air, Meanwhile back at home the finance company took his car.*” In the closing verse Earle reveals the ‘other side of the coin,’ by shifting the focus to Gaza where Ali, “*the second son of a second son*” becomes radicalised and, subsequently, a suicide bomber - “*A fat man in a new Mercedes drove him to the door, He’s just another poor boy off to fight a rich man’s war.*” When Joel performed “I Ought To Know” at Kerrville’s Threadgill Theatre this year, the song’s author Jack Hardy leapt of out of the audience and added his voice to the rendition. An ironic paeon to awareness – or at least the lack of it – the song appeared on Jack’s “**Omens**” [2000]. The narrator, a tv couch potato, berates himself for his lack of knowledge of politically and socially significant events down through the centuries, in America and around this planet.

“Missing Pages” can be summed up as a prayer for social justice [and I guess, healing], and where Inmon’s guitar playing throughout this collection is stellar, his mellifluous “Missing Pages” intro is simply to die for. As for Rad, he consistently smacks the ball out of the park with his contributions on piano and B3 organ. Rafael’s “Dancing To The Drum” lyric can be interpreted as personal and universal – “*Even though the ice gets thin, we haven’t fallen through,*” while reconciliation through the currency of truth is his focus in “Open Up Your Heart.” It appears that “Wild Honey,” a joyful worded, sensually themed number, was penned a number of decades ago by Mark McClemore and Joel when the latter resided in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State. Rafael’s now out-of-print sophomore recording “**Old Wood Barn**” [1996] featured “Time Stands Still” a philosophical reflection on halcyon days spent discovering life’s treasures. Joel’s daughter Jamaica shares the vocal on “Song Of Socrates,” wherein the narrator urges that we take the time to explore ‘our inner self’ as well the glories and mysteries planet Earth has to offer.

“Reluctant Angel,” also the name of Rafael’s song publishing company, previously appeared on the aforementioned “**The Joel Rafael Band**” and this collection, Joel’s sixth, closes with two new numbers - “Promised Land” and “Rivers And Rain.” An air of mystery pervades the former wherein the narrator journeys through a strange country eventually fording a – scared? - river, while the latter is a joyous exposition of this planet’s water cycle. And there you have “**Thirteen Stories High**,” two covers and eleven Joel Rafael originals, many of which are shiny bright, new and bear repeated listening.

Folkwax score 9 out of 10.

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 07/08.