



Various “**Hands Across The Water**” Compass Records

Musically speaking, the Celtic World meets the New World in this roots flavoured charity collection. During a telephone conversation between musician/manager/web-caster John Cutcliffe and musician Andrea Zonn two days after the Asian tsunami struck, the idea of this recording was floated. Based on a plan to pool their musical contacts, Zonn initially intimated reservations - “*It’ll never work.*” Undaunted and literally one year on this Cutcliffe/Zonn co-production has hit record stores. 100 musicians, 30 engineers and 30 studios in North America, Europe and Australasia were eventually involved in bringing this inspired sixteen-track disc to fruition. The songs featured are a mix of the already familiar as well as the totally original, presented, track-on-track, by international combinations of traditional and contemporary roots musicians.

By way of describing the latter “picking pattern,” the opening cut is a classic case in point. “The Beggar’s Heart” is a new Darrell Scott composition and, supported by Kenny Malone [drums], Danny Thompson [acoustic bass], Dan Dugmore [piano] and more, his vocal was recorded in Nashville, while Muirreann Nic Amhlaoibh [vocal, whistle] and Oisín McAuley [five string fiddle] of Danu added their parts in the former’s Dublin flat. Amhlaoibh’s whistle solo is truly atmospheric. Finally Irish bred, French based Paul Rodden captured his contribution on banjo in a Nantes studio. I guess you get the idea. Scott’s lyrical theme “*These words I sing they ring familiar, These words I sing I’ve heard before, Oh fair thee well my one and own true love [+], I’ll see you in my dreams once more*” permeates other songs in this collection.

In terms of encapsulating the human condition a number of the songs were written centuries ago, yet remain utterly pertinent today. In that regard, Capercaillie vocalist Karen Matheson joins forces with Canada’s The Duhks and Bryan Sutton [acoustic guitar] on a musical adaptation of “Ae Fond Kiss” Robert Burns’ classic [1791] poem about lovers parting. While listed as tracks 5 and 6 in the liner booklet, the well known traditional numbers “Fair And Tender Ladies” and “A Man Of Constant Sorrow” appear in reverse order on the disc. The former features bluegrass giant Tim O’Brien and Irish traditional band Lunasa, while “A Man Of Constant Sorrow” originally appeared on Sharon Shannon’s star-studded 2004 release “**The Diamond Mountain Sessions.**” Featuring Shannon [accordion, whistle] and Jackson Browne [vocal, guitar] it’s a remixed version that’s presented here.

A few of these centuries old numbers are hymns. For instance, Beth Nielsen Chapman interprets the 1752 Katheryn von Schlegel lyric “Be Still My Soul.” Set to Sibelius’ melody “Finlandia,” it’s the most haunting and affecting cut on this collection [well, at least for this listener]. Chapman is supported by contributions from Michael McGoldrick [whistle] and Donald Shaw [accordion], recorded in Australia. Irish band Altan rework “Let’s Heal,” a traditional number from their homeland and are joined, vocally, by Vince Gill. The result is another atmospheric track – possessing a mantra mankind should heed. Cerys Matthews, former vocalist with the Welsh band Catatonia, now a solo act in her own right, joins forces with John Jorgenson [clarinet] and Stuart Duncan [fiddle] on the traditional Welsh air “An Occasional Song.” Singing in both her native tongue and in English, the clarinet and fiddle add a klezmer flavour to the track.

Elsewhere, assisted by Mairtín O’Connor [accordion] and Alison Brown [banjo], Jon Randall vocalises on his song about survival “Get Through It.” Penned by Sally Barris “Standing Still” features Andrea Zonn [vocal, fiddle and viola] supported by English folk band Flook. Solas vocalist Deirdre Scanlan duets with Mindy Smith on “Reasonland,” while, supported by the “new” addition of Altan’s Dermot Byrne

[accordion], John Prine harmonises with his Donegal born wife Fiona on “Til A Tear Becomes A Rose.” Sans Bryne the latter cut first appeared on Prine’s **“In Spite of Ourselves”** [1999]. Supported vocally by Paul Brady, Rodney Crowell tackles his one time father-in-law’s “40 Shades Of Green.” I am of course referring to the late Johnny Cash. Co-written by Darrell Scott and John Cowan, and supported by the Brock McGuire Band, Cowan takes the lead vocal on the up-tempo “Cumberland Plateau.” Solely featuring Zonn’s fiddle, Jim Lauderdale and Maura O’Connell harmonise on “This World’s Family.” Blue Merle vocalist Luke Reynolds co-wrote “Part Of Your History” with Jamie Hartford, son of the late and legendary John Hartford [#], and he’s joined by the seemingly untutored, yet stunningly ethereal voice of County Kerry bred Pauline Scanlon.

The album closer, and only instrumental, “In The Sweet By And By” first appeared on Jerry Douglas’ album **“Lookout For Hope”** [2002]. This traditional number has been revised for **“Hands Across The Water”** by the addition of haunting whistle-playing by Altan’s Ciaran Tourish. It was death-dealing catastrophe of unimaginable magnitude that triggered the creation of this recording, while, subjectively, the songs featured generally celebrate, for those left behind, mankind’s capacity to quietly deal with adversity, to once again pick up the pieces of shattered lives and move forward, while eternally treasuring memories of those that are gone. Further details about this worthy recording project can be found on the web at <http://www.andreazonn.com/> and <http://www.handsacrossthewater.com/>

Note.

[+] – Exemplifying the folk process in motion, the best known source of this line is probably “The Leaving Of Liverpool,” a seafaring song that supposedly dates from late nineteenth century.

[#] – Jamie has recorded an album titled **“Part Of Our History”** that features eleven of his father’s compositions, plus the Reynolds/Hartford co-write.

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

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