



Jeff Black **"Honey And Salt"** Blue Rose Records

The story goes that circa the turn of the new century, **"Honey And Salt,"** should have been Black's sophomore release on the Arista Austin label. Instead, like countless musicians before him, Black joined the lengthening queue of artists who found their music career headed for the dumpster, following the collapse/restructuring of yet another label. All was not lost, however, and *two angels* came to the rescue in the form of former Arista Austin executives Dan Harrington and Scott Robinson, who founded the independent Dualtone Records. That imprint released Black's **"B-Sides And Confessions, Volume 1"** and in Folkwax Issue # 104 we reviewed the recording, awarding it a 9. Which brings us to **"Honey And Salt,"** the shelved sophomore set. Edgar Heckmann came to the rescue, and his German based Blue Rose label issued the disc at the beginning of 2003.

A ten-track collection, two of the cuts - "One Last Day To Live" and "The Leaving" – were recorded at Echo Park Studios in Bloomington, Indiana and were co-produced by Black and Paul Mahern. Mahern is a native of Indianapolis, where he played in the bands *Zero Boys* and *Datura Seed*. Echo Park Studio is owned by John Mellencamp's guitarist, Mike Wanchic, and his partner, Mark Hood. The remainder of the disc, produced by Black, was recorded at Omni and Nightengale Studio in Tennessee. Gary Paczosa, who has worked with Alison Krauss, Dixie Chicks and Nickel Creek, recorded and engineered the Tennessee sessions.

Where, aurally, **"B-Sides And Confessions, Volume 1"** was essentially an acoustic recording, Black is supported on **"Honey And Salt"** by a four-piece band consisting of Will Kimbrough [guitar/mandolin], Joey Nardone [piano/organ], David Jacques [bass] and Chris Wright [drums]. Six of the cuts are medium paced, roots rock numbers in a blue-collar vein ala Springsteen/Mellencamp, while the remainder are acoustic ballads.

"One Last Day To Live," opens the album. Subjectively the lyric, explores the scenario *"If you had one last day to live, And your soul was free from doubt,"* what would you do ? In later verses *"doubt"* is replaced by *"fear"* and *"shame."* Basically the song is an evocation not to waste time, but to live each and every day to its fullest extent, and to express to those near and dear to you, what your true feelings are. Featuring a restrained electric guitar throughout the album title cut, Black delivers the punch line in the closing line of the final verse with, *"Is it a sweeter life, By the trial we share."*

While "Rain" is probably the nearest to a full on rock track, ala Springsteen, the song possesses a discernable melody. Slowing the tempo, Jeff is supported by a piano on the bittersweet "Time." Visiting an old flame, who doesn't *"seem too amused"* to see him, the narrator in "Time" sets out his store with *"I see you in the morning sun, In the flight of the blue heron"* and *"I see in the evening sky, And I see you in my dreams."* Black goes on to set a seal on this, long dead, relationship with *"This song was easy to write, It just came to me last night, It only took me fifteen years."*

A matter of four minutes long and delivered semi-spoken, as "The Leaving" unfolds it captures the disintegration and termination of a relationship. An Echo Park recording, an acoustic guitar, piano, and shaker support Black's voice. In the lyric, poetic images merge with those rooted in reality - *"She grabbed up a few things she needed, Her heart her soul, The keys to the car and she left, It was a gray day"* and *"It's hard to see the future, looking backwards through a telescope"* being two superb examples.

"You Belong To Me" and "Shout From The Street" find Jeff ploughing through blue-collar territory again, only to slow the pace once more for the penultimate cut, "Persephone." Up front there's an acoustic guitar and mandolin, and in the background a piano, as, founded upon the legend of Persephone - queen of the underworld, Black's lyric encapsulates the narrator's helpless infatuation - *"And sometimes I get the feeling, When I'm knocking at the door, That with the devil I'm dealing, But I keep coming back for more."* The closing selection, "Home," is equally restrained and based around acoustic instruments, as the narrator dreams of the *sweet girl* that he is finally returning to.....*"keep her safe till I get there."*

Currently only released in Europe, you will have deduced by now that this Jeff Black album is yet another gem, and is available on the internet from www.bluerose.com On this German based site, an English language option is available, just look out for the US flag. I've been reliably informed that Black is also selling this recording at his gigs.

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

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