



Kate Campbell **"Save The Day"** Large River Records

Album producer Walt Aldridge and Kate Campbell go back aways. They met during the 1990's when Campbell worked as a staff writer at Fame Music in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Walt produced **"Monuments"** [2002] and **"Blues And Lamentations"** [2005], and **"Save The Day"** is their latest collaboration – note the arithmetic progression? Walt's guitar and backing vocals can be heard on a number of Kate's other releases. And the same can be said for many of the session players on this new set - sic. the legendary keyboard genius Spooner Oldham, plus Dave Jacques [bass], Jim Hoke [clarinet, accordion] and Mark Narmore [organ]. **"Save The Day"** also features a number of 'guest vocalists,' more of which later.

The disc is housed in an eco-card gatefold liner – to their credit, many independent musicians are settling for this style of liner these days. On one inside leg of the gatefold, Kate alludes to a number of her lyrical 'inspirations' – *a photograph by Daryl Thetford, the writer Harper Lee and more*. The first page of the liner booklet features a quote from American Presbyterian minister and author [Carl] Frederick Buechner, that ends with the words **"Save The Day."** Subjectively and stylistically, this latest Campbell opus amounts to a marriage of the rich 'American South' story songs that suffused her early albums, and the spiritual approach adopted on later releases such as **"Wandering Strange"** and **"Blues And Lamentations."**

Buechner's quote is drawn from his 1988 work **"Whistling In The Dark: A Doubter's Dictionary"** and "Save The Day," co-written with Aldridge, is a treatise on the 'major and minor' that assists we humans to traverse life day by day – *"For some people it's a brand new car, For some it's just a parking space."* The ensuing pairing "Welcome To Ray" and "Fordlandia" reflect on places where 'man' has to live out his days. Introduced by Carl Jones' finger-picked banjo, and co-written with him, the former is set in the copper mining area of Arizona. Founded early last century, the town of Ray was bulldozed fifty years later to make way for an open-pit mine – progress or profit margin? Co-written with Aldridge, "Fordlandia" finds Kate and Nanci Griffith sharing the vocal. Circa the late 1920's, Henry Ford constructed the city of Fordlandia on the banks of Brazil's River Amazon. He planned to cultivate rubber trees on a massive scale, tap them and use the latex to make his own tyres, thereby undercutting the [monopolised] cost of Malayan sourced raw material – the result Ford's profit margin would be boosted. His crucial omission? Henry failed to consult a botanist. The enterprise struggled from the outset and although another city, Belterra, was constructed in a more suitable location further upstream, by 1940, having outlaid the current day equivalent of \$200M, the project was abandoned.

The Campbell/Aldridge co-write "Dark Night Of The Soul" previously appeared on **"For The Living Of These Days,"** her 'stripped down' 2006 studio collaboration with Spooner. Here, it's given a soulful band treatment. A couple of songs possess literary links, both books being memoirs. Gene Cheek, the Caucasian author of **"Color Of Love: A Mother's Choice In The Jim Crow South,"** invited Campbell to pen a song to accompany his 2005 book – hence "Color of Love." "More Than One More Day" is a rare thing in Kate's canon, a love song. Campbell's inspiration was **"The Year Of Magical Thinking,"** Joan Didion's 2005 award-winning book, which explored the author's sense of loss following her beloved husband's sudden demise. In the period covered by Didion's book, additionally, she had to tend to the needs of a gravely ill daughter. The title "Looking For Jesus" hints at pilgrimage, and that's precisely the thrust of this Campbell/Aldridge creation. John Prine shares the vocal duties on the latter.

Next year will mark the fortieth anniversary of America's first landing, and "Back To The Moon" is a call to return there – including a subtle Campbell lyrical retro-reference to *"moonpies"* - while "Falling Out Of Heaven," also a Campbell/Aldridge co-write, opens with the Moses led, wilderness wandering, hungry

Israelites finding manna, then moves on to reflect on contemporary famine, flood and faith and closes with a prayer for a planet wide end to human conflict. Mac McNally adds a harmony vocal to the latter cut. A reflection on the [overwhelming] price of fame, Kate's co-writer Mark Narmore plays organ on "Everybody Knows Elvis." The definitive twang of a 12 string Rickenbacher takes the lead on the spiritually slanted "Shining Like The Sun," while Harper Lee's only [published] book, **"To Kill A Mockingbird"** inspired "Sorrowfree." On this the closing track, Kate is accompanied by piano man Spooner Oldham. In the closing verse, indulging in a sly wink, Kate writes *"Oh the things that neighbours sometimes bring, Food for funerals, flowers for sickness."*

The word "day" appears in the lyric to ten of the twelve songs. The song lyrics are reproduced in the liner booklet, and a square is drawn around each occurrence of "day" [and for that matter its plural] – *fence it in, save the day*. Finally, the closing page of the liner booklet carries a dedication to the late Johnny Pierce [d. 2005] producer of Kate's early recordings.

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 10/08.