



Bill Staines **"The Second Million Miles"** Red House Records

Rounder Records released a number of Bill Staines albums during the nineteen-eighties and nineties, and by way of summing up those releases issued Vol.1 and Vol. 2 of a compilation they titled **"The First Million Miles."** During the period 1989 through 2005, the Minnesota based imprint Red House Records released half a dozen new studio albums by Staines, and also reissued the live recording **"Bridges"** [1989] [#]. By way of encapsulating the past decade and a half of his musical career Red House have now released a seventeen-track retrospective, the first volume of Bill Staines' **"The Second Million Miles."**

Born and bred in Massachusetts and a New Hampshire resident for many years, four of the aforementioned studio albums were recorded at Straight Up Studios in Arlington, Massachusetts and produced by Bill, while the consecutive pairing of **"Going To The West"** [1993] and **"Looking To The West"** [1995] were produced by Texas bred guitarist Brian Wood [Nanci Griffith, Betty Elders, Sarah Elizabeth Campbell] and recorded at Loma Ranch Studio near the hill country town of Fredericksburg, Texas. **"The Happy Wanderer"** [1993] was a family recording, as was **"One More River"** [1998]. Staines received a Parents Magazine, Parents Award for the former recording. Staines most recent Red House recordings **"October's Hill"** [2000] and **"Journey Home"** [2004] have found this perennial *voyager of the highway* reflecting, by way of the songs featured, upon his five decade long performing and recording career. In terms of the songs Bill recorded for his most recent releases - some were old, traditional even - some brand new – some penned by Staines – some penned by others.

Like the opening salutation to an old acquaintance, it's fitting that this retrospective commences with the jaunty "Dear Friend" from **"October's Hill."** Kerrville New Folk Contest winner Melissa Javors shares the vocal with Bill on the loving and personal epistle "Child Of Mine." Penned by Bill, the lead voice in the lyric is that of a woman. There's some fine playing on the latter cut by sometime Jimmy LaFave band member David Webb on piano, while Gene Elders fiddle playing adds further poignancy to the message contained in the lyric. Also taken from **"Going To The West,"** "Autumn Waltz [The Wind River Turnaround]" is a wonderfully melodic instrumental performed by the foregoing pair of session players. From **"October's Hill,"** the hymn like "When I Hear The Music Play" opens with Staines' fond recollection of finding music as a youngster, and in the later verses he affirms its power in healing the wounded spirit and heart. During the early nineteen-nineties Bill learned how to fly, and he obliquely celebrated that event by including "Song For Tingmissartog" his tribute to those pioneers of flight, the Lindbergs, on **"Looking For The Wind."** Life's journey is the theme that threads its way through the lines of "Crossing The Water," one of a quartet of **"Going To The West"** tracks on this compilation.

Two of the four cover songs on **"The Second Million Miles"** are drawn from Staines' *family recordings*, respectively, being the traditional numbers "Little Brown Dog" from **"The Happy Wanderer"** and "Leatherwing Bat" from **"One More River,"** while Mary McCaslin's *cowboy fantasy* "Prairie In The Sky" appeared on **"Journey Home."** Culled from the latter collection, this retrospective closes, appropriately, with Bill's performance of the shaker hymn "How Can I Keep From Singing." The latter lyric, in a way, sums up the countless miles that this time served musician has travelled in pursuit of performing his music. That music possesses a gentility and grace that calls to mind decades gone by, when life was simpler and the world was a less cynical place.

Note.

[#] – **“Bridges”** was originally released in 1984 on the Extempore label.

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 08/05.