



Tracy Grammer **"Flower Of Avalon"** Signature Sounds Recording Company

"Drum Hat Buddha," the third duo recording by Dave Carter and Tracy Grammer was officially released by Signature Sounds on 12th June 2001. Four hundred and three days later Carter passed from this earthly plane. A beautiful and loving creation, **"Flower Of Avalon"** features nine new Dave Carter songs. Tracy Grammer began work on the recording in late 2003 and Signature Sounds officially released the disc on 26th April 2005, one thousand and eleven days since Oklahoma Dave, the writer of lyrics, crystal clear as well as seemingly opaque, left us. Once upon a time a native New Yorker wrote, *"Seasons change with the scenery, Weaving time in a tapestry, Won't you stop and remember me".....*As time passes, we'll have to be patient for opportunities to indulge in new portions of Carter's musical legacy. One truth is indisputable, **without** Tracy Grammer there would be precious few opportunities to indulge.....

Co-produced by Grammer and John Jennings, Mary Chapin Carpenter's long time musical collaborator, the support players on this collection include guitar/mandolin wizard Jim Henry - Tracy's current companion on the endless highway, Lorne Entress drummer and album producer extraordinaire, MC2's keyboard player Jon Carroll and on support vocals, Chapin. The title of Carpenter's 2004 release **"Between Here And Gone,"** was inspired by words Tracy used in an e-mail she sent to the on-line Dave & Tracy Digest days after Carter passed. It's fitting that Chapin chose to add her voice to this release.

When I first heard Dave 'n' Tracy circa '97, Carter called his creations *"post-modern mythic American music,"* and that nom-de-plume assuredly fits the *traditional to contemporary* contents of this disc. Melodically, Carter's songs touch countless stylistic bases, not in imitation but with an intimate's understanding of the intricacies of each style. As for Dave's words they are a majestic marriage of, literally, every facet of life. That's not to say that Carter hasn't injected his customary measure of mystery into the tales on **"Flower Of Avalon."** To obtain maximum payback the listener must be prepared to do some work in unravelling the aforementioned mysteries.....beware, however, as aurally and intellectually, the contents of this disc are addictive.....very addictive.

Mystery abounds in the opening cut, "Shadows Of Evangeline," a lyric full of diverse images including *red lights, silver dimes, skin drums* and *shrunk heads*. As "Gypsy Rose" closes you discover that the narrator, with the clarity of yesterday, recalls events that occurred thirty-three years ago. The key to this tale of love, marriage and early death lies in the second line of the opening verse *"Wild is the only way he grows."* Given the choice, I'd suspect that it's Jennings who plays the 60's sounding Rickenbacker guitar – think, The Searchers - on this cut. The only cover on this collection is the traditional sounding "Laughlin Boy," which relates the true story of a Quaker, Sam Laughlin [#], who, having been drafted into Confederate Army in Virginia, refused to fight. The song is actually a recent work and William Jolliff has married his lyric to an upbeat adaptation of the traditional "The Johnson Boys."

At first sight "Hey Ho" appears to be a throwaway title, yet is a bitingly honest anti-war song that opens, simply, with a child watching a western on television. On planet Earth a fine line divides fantasy from reality, and Dave goes on to explore the human fascination with men who do battle, while pointing a finger directly at *"the merchant kings of war and woe,"* whether purveyors of toy weapons or the real deal. In this push button age death can be dealt from a distance, and in the world's wars during recent decades we have all become voyeurs via television. One of Carter's lyrical ploys involved employing words because of the sound they made, and in the penultimate verse of "Hey Ho" the letter "b" is paramount, while there won't be many songs this year that will feature the word bassinet [+]. As for the

closing lines of that verse, "*We'll play a **game** with **tanks** and **jets**, Better yet – **bayonets**,*" Dave's words of warning are unequivocal. Spanning the cradle to the grave, maybe this is the finest anti-war song ever written. A throwaway title it is not.....

For me, there are two possible interpretations for "Winter When He Goes." It's either an *up close and personal* melancholic anthem of loss, but could be a eulogy to the passing of the seasons. In relation to the former approach, without needlessly exalting her, how Grammer possesses the courage to make it all the way through this *song of leaving* is beyond me. As the story line evolves, Carter indulges in word juxtaposition – for instance – the conventional "*He collects the twigs and briars, I stack them up for fire,*" is followed by "*It's chilly for the burning.*" As for the seasonal approach [I mentioned], renewal is expressed in the closing verse, which includes the snapshot "*The Bluestem's [*] runnin' riot, The daisies break their fetters, And the bees will not lay quiet.*" Death appears in the lyrics of this collection on a number of occasions and the closing track "Any Way I Do" is no exception. By conception it's a 21st century gospel song for the common man devoid of the religious imagery that is the norm for the genre, yet in that regard it is no less powerful.

Elsewhere on "**Flower Of Avalon**" a man is accosted by a woman, while standing at a bus stop, and by the close of the enigmatic "Hard To Make It," he has boarded the vehicle alone. I recall Carter and Grammer performing the then unnamed and somewhat opaque "Mother, I Climbed" at the Fall 2001 Kerrville Wine & Music Festival. "Preston Miller" honours the folk tradition of murder ballads, and features the bastard offspring of Jacob Miller, who, cast out of the family home at birth, grows up to be a reckless rake. Melodically "Phantom Doll" is marriage of pop and jazz, and takes vanity as one of its themes. At the outset we're introduced to "*Raggedy Ann,*" and in the closing verse Dave adds the humorous [self-deprecating even] "*Raggedly Andy wrote this song.*"

"**Flower Of Avalon**" is the fruition of many things, not least Grammer's tireless championing of Dave's legacy. For certain Tracy has never sung or played with more feeling, and on "**Flower Of Avalon**" she captures and honours every Carter lyrical nuance. As for those essential *precious moments*, on this collection, Tracy giggles as "Phantom Doll" fades, while the "*oh no*" she utters a couple of times during the performance of "Laughlin Boy" are a sure sign of someone having fun doing what she loves - playing music. Already in April '05, this disc seems like a Best of Year certainty.....and late next February [2006] if there was any justice in this world.....

Note.

[#] – For more details of Laughlin's story, go to the section headed "I Refuse To Fight" at the following link http://www.ehistory.com/uscw/features/articles_new/display.cfm?NationId=15

[+] – The Oxford English definition is "*A hooded wicker cradle or pram.*"

[*] – Bluestem is a prairie tall-grass. The leaves can be used for hay or forage. It begins growth in April, flowers in late summer, and grows up to 8 feet in height.

Folkwax Rating 10 out of 10

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 04/05