



## Chip Taylor “**This Side Of The Big River**” Collectors’ Choice Records

This country music flavoured collection first saw the light of day during 1975, and was the last of three albums Chip Taylor [real name, James Wesley Voight] cut for Warner Brothers Records. It opens with the two-step paced, biographical “Same Ol’ Story” in which Taylor name checks his late golf professional father Elmer, references the [then] recently ended Vietnam War and how President Thieu [much to his chagrin] had to flee the country leaving behind a cache of gold bullion. Released as a single in Holland – country rock was always a real big deal there – “Same Ol’ Story” made # 2 on the Dutch Pop Chart and for a time Taylor was able to tour there. A few months back we reviewed Taylor’s latest solo release “**Unglorious Hallelujah**” a 2CD collection that featured a number of songs inspired by Taylor’s ex-wife Joan, the mother of his children. Three decades back it was no different and the second cut, the waltz paced “Holding Me Together,” opens with the reflection *“There was a time when I thought I’d never make it, And it took your sweet love to get me through, And you’ve been holding me together for such a long time.”* Farther on in this collection the segue of “Circle Of Tears” – *“I’ll never change my loving you, Not for a minute, It’s just life and all that’s in it”* - and the melodically dreamy “Sleepy Eyes” – *“And you took him for better or worse than you dreamed it could be”* - were similarly inspired by Chip’s relationship with Joan.

Pursuing further the art of the autobiographical lyric, the pretty much self-explanatory title “John Tucker’s On The Wagon Again” amounts to a recollection of Chip’s days playing country music in New York bars, and of a North Carolina bred acquaintance [and fan]. Pitched almost midway through the album is the only cover song, Johnny Cash’s tribute to the Mississippi “Big River” [#]. The latter pair of songs and the reflective [and similarly autobiographical] album closer “You’re Alright, Charlie” are live performances recorded at WHNW-FM in Hooksett, New Hampshire. Which brings me to the reflection, who knows what the future holds for us? Circa 1975, Chip stepped to one side and his electric/acoustic guitarist George Kiriakis was the mellow sounding lead vocalist on “May God Be With Me.” Curious to relate, Kiriakis has been based out of Fairfield County, Connecticut since the early 1980’s – sadly he suffered a stroke in August of last year – where he has tended to the religious needs of that community as a preacher and musician [with the band His Own].

Taylor was a young whippersnapper, all of thirty-five years, when he recorded “**This Side Of The Big River**” yet the collection features a tune titled “Gettin’ Older, Lookin’ Back” which hinges on the hook *“And I’m wishin’ I was younger, getting’ older, lookin’ back”* and goes on to deliver the personal and heartfelt insight *“There are heroes in the morning you can’t see till the shadows fall, And Daddy if you’re listenin’, I think I heard your bluebird call.”* The studio cuts on “**This Side Of The Big River**” were mostly recorded at Minot Sound in White Plains, New York and the featured pickers include John Platania [in the 21<sup>st</sup> century he’s still a Taylor sideman], Sandy Bull, David Mansfield [two decades later he helped Chip record the comeback albums “**The Living Room Tapes**” and “**Hit Man**”], while the contributions from Pete Drake [pedal steel], Buddy Spicher [fiddle] and The Jordanares [backing vocals] were captured at Pete’s Place in Nashville. A number of this Yonkers, NY bred musician’s early career albums have been released on CD in Japan, and late last century “**Last Chance**” [1974] was [even] available for a time on Taylor’s Train Wreck label - hopefully the appearance of “**This Side Of The Big River**” is the tip of an iceberg that will see all of Chip’s early career solo recordings back in print ere long.

### Note.

[#] – “Big River” reached # 4 on the Billboard Country Singles Chart in February 1958, and was the B-Side of Cash’s third # 1 Country single “Ballad Of A Teenage Queen.”

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