



Richard Dobson "**Doppelgaenger**" Brambus Records

The front of the liner booklet bears the legend *Limited Edition*, and Dobson's liner notes confirm that the *back to basics* recording approach on this disc, of only using *two acoustic guitars, occasional harmonica and one or two voices*, was deliberate. Dobson, a Texan who is based in Switzerland these days, is a contemporary folk/country songwriter in the vein of [and the equal of] Van Zandt, Clark [Guy, that is] and Taylor.

The noun "**Doppelgaenger**" is defined by the Concise Oxford English Dictionary as *a wraith of a living person*. In other words a ghostly or spiritual double. The *spiritual double* here is Dobson's co-producer/fellow picker/compadre Thomm Jutz. As for the thirteen songs on the disc, they equate to an intriguing brew of traditional tunes, covers and Dobson originals. This is Richard's fourteenth album, and, in the main, his previous works have been constructed around original self-penned compositions. It's true that there are half a dozen Dobson's originals included here, although "Jesus Take Me Fishing" – an invitation to a light hearted, alcohol fuelled angling expedition - first appeared on "**The Big Taste**" [1979], while "So Have I" [#] and "Forever, For Always, For Certain" [*] hail from "**True West**" [1986].

As Dobson succinctly states in the liner notes, these songs were picked at random, although the *repetitive* theme that soon emerged was that of being "*homeless*." Although the Woody Guthrie classics "I Ain't Got No Home" and "Pastures of Plenty" respectively appear toward the start and end of the collection, the traditional opening song "Woody Knows Nothing" is not a reference to the Oklahoma born song scribe. Dobson claims he heard the song, an image filled tale of love lost, when he was at College during the early sixties. Blaze Foley, Austin's most famous [homeless] street musician, never released an *official* recording during his lifetime and was gunned down in 1989 while intervening in a family feud. A posthumously released live recording [-], and a series of four compilation albums of Foley tunes recorded by Austin's diverse musical community have seen the light of day over the last decade. On "**Doppelgaenger**" Dobson covers Foley's "Small Town Hero," which focuses upon a totally dysfunctional family and a series of everyday happenings in their lives.

In a light-hearted manner, the traditional "The Boll Weevil Song" kicks off with a conversation between a bullfrog and a weevil. The lyric goes on to survey the crop damage wrought by the insect, which saw countless American cotton farmers declare bankruptcy during the twentieth century. The point being that the, somewhat final, latter process made those farmers and their families homeless. The remaining traditional tune "Across The Wide Missouri" is also known as "Shenandoah." Twenty years have elapsed since fellow Texan, Rodney Crowell and Dobson, co-wrote "Uncertain Texas," yet it only seems like yesterday. In the lyric the pair declare an undying affection for the state of their birth. Apart from Crowell's own interpretation, the latter song has been cut by Guy Clark ["**Better Days**" produced by Crowell in 1983], while Dobson included it on "**Blue Collar Blues**" [1992]. Richard and Thomm's decision to revisit it has resulted in a *rough edged diamond*, and one of the highlights of this set.

And finally....that leaves us with the trio of new Dobson tunes. According to Richard a lyrical fragment dating from the early seventies became the *glistening, snow dusted* love song "No Blue Song." "Woody Went Down In The Deep Hold" is a recollection of the time Guthrie, in the company of Cisco Houston and Jimmy Longhi, spent serving in the merchant marine during WWII. The gentle and thoughtful closing cut, "May You Glide Like A River / The Birthday Song," appropriately, lists numerous ways in which to live your life well – hopefully, in a secure, loving and happy home environment.

There's a melodic eloquence about Jutz's guitar picking, which, merged with Dobson's rough hewn vocals, makes this intentionally low tech recording a worthwhile and repeatable listening experience. In fact, its simplicity is so engaging that, I'd go as far as to rate it as one of 2002's greatest musical treasures. Hopefully, it's a secret no longer.....

Note.

[#] This song about daydreaming and making those dreams come true, was co-written by Guy and Susanna Clark and Dobson.

[*] A love song, it was recorded by Guy Clark for his 1999 album "**Cold Dog Soup.**"

[~] "**Blaze Foley Live at the Austin Outhouse**" Lost Art Records [1999]

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

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