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CD REVIEWS - THE NEW RELEASES

Fairport Convention FESTIVAL BELL

Matty Grooves Records MGCD050

★★★

Another brilliant addition to the vast collection of albums by Fairport Convention

For those that weren't sure (or are just into a bit of trivia) at last count Fairport Convention have recorded a staggering twenty-seven 'official' studio and live albums and excluding the 'lost in action' MANOR ALBUM makes FESTIVAL BELL their twenty-eighth to date. How they have managed to hold everything together for so long is quite beyond me. Perhaps it's the fact that every now and then they inject themselves with some kind of longevity serum and kick-start the latest episode with a batch of new songs and tunes. The majority of the writing credits these days are



Danny Schmidt MAN OF MANY MOONS

Red House Records

★★★★★

A suite of Schmidt lyrics that will sustain listener's for a lifetime

To all intents MAN OF MANY MOONS could be a Danny Schmidt solo live recording, such is the intentional stripped-bare sonic presentation. Apart from the Texan's voice and acoustic guitar, the sparse window dressing amounts to subtle vocal support from Carrie Elkin and Raina Rose, leavened by minimal contributions on (lead) guitar and bass by Will Sexton, one Ray Bonneville harmonica solo, and a single piano interlude from co-producer Keith Gary. Gary is the chief engineer at the Blue Rock Studio in Wimberley, Texas where the album sessions took place during July and October last year.

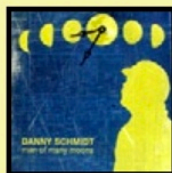
Viewed in its entirety *Houses Sing*, the lyric to the opening song, is an intricately woven tapestry inspired by one of life's truly stressful activities, the search for and purchase of a property. In *Houses Sing* Schmidt poetically surveys the hunt for suitable habitation, while also contemplating how, through the passage of time and application of human endeavour—plus, dare I employ that four letter word, l-o-v-e—a house becomes a home. Forty-five years ago the Glimmer Twins *Mother's Little Helper* turned the focus on 'a little something that will get you through the day.' Schmidt's *Little White Angels* encapsulates how the cure can sometimes become the cause with: 'the things we need, The same things that choke us in the end.'

Laying down foundations in life implies acceptance of the possibility that they may become permanent. Making decisions lies at the heart of this collection, the title song amounting to an exposition of the foregoing possibility. Alluding to the permanency of 'words,' during the latter title Danny sings: 'They're like statues in a storm.' Despite the uncertainty expressed (in the lyric), for me *Man Of Many Moons* is, hands down, another awe-inspiring love song. Aware of my penchant for music of a folkie persuasion, people visibly blink at the utterance: 'Don't own a Dylan record. Probably never will.' That doesn't mean I'm immune to (all) his songs, *Buckets Of Rain* being a case in point. For me Jeff Foucault and Danny Schmidt, musically speaking, are cut from similar cloth. The boy from the North Country took a tilt at this Dylan tune back in 2003 on Redbird's eponymous debut, and here Schmidt, a son of the south, delivers his interpretation.

The 'moon' reappears, briefly, in second and fourth (and final) verses of the allegory and metaphor rich, but ultimately hilarious, *Ragtime Ragtime Blues*, the repeating mid-verse link being: 'baby's gone mad again.' Beastly Orwellian—but most definitely non-totalitarian—social and political commentary, bookended by nods to Verne, lies at the heart of *Guilty By Association Blues*, while its ensuing sibling *Almost Round The World* envisions escalating international misinterpretation followed a journalist's 'misguided' comments regarding the *Guilty* lyric. Both songs are, nonetheless, leavened with lashings of satirical wit. Replete with lyrical twists—or possibly twisted lyrics—for instance: 'Giant leaps of heresy, Or baby steps towards infamy,' friendship is the focus of *Two Guitars*, and it's followed by a trio of the most personal words, lines and verses I've heard this Texan sing. A fairer distribution among nations of their excess goods and skills is advocated in *On Abundance*, I've Mostly Watched is touchingly honest, while *Know Thy Place* gently tenders the maxim live life and live it fully.

There's sufficient meat on Schmidt's MAN OF MANY MOONS lyrics to sustain the listener for a lifetime. Listen to them long and often, you won't be disappointed...and that's about as complete as any song collection can expect to be. **Arthur Wood**

<http://www.dannyschmidt.com/>



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