

fROOTS

Local Music From Out There



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siblings soaring : the new dynasty of english folk

JONATHAN BYRD

The Law And The Lonesome Waterbug Records WBG 085

You have to hand it to Jonathan Byrd because, musically speaking, he doesn't hang around in the same place for long. In the almost nine years of the 21st millennium this is his fifth release, and I think it's fair to say that no two have been alike. The characters that journey through the ten songs on *The Law And The Lonesome* are brittle, hard bitten, desperate and mostly down on their luck. Some are losers in love. The photographs that grace the 12-page liner booklet go a long way to reinforce the 'underbelly of life' scenarios painted by Byrd's lyrics. On the cover of the booklet, surrounded by barren scrubby landscape, a crow sits defiantly on a barbed wire fence while 'his friends' circle above, there's a dilapidated-looking motel, and a nervous-looking coyote scurrying for cover. Throughout, there's nary one sign of a human being. That's lonesome!

A sombre, haunting stringed instrument supports Byrd's finger-picked acoustic guitar on the opening, title track. Sounds like a cello, but in truth it is co-producer Chris Bartos' five-string violin. Built around the repeated "You took the wrong way home", as the principal character journeys to heaven knows where, he becomes progressively more confused: "The snow's like a ghost of cocaine on the highway, It shifts and plays tricks on your mind." Poetic devices inform the latter, and

Byrd repeats the process in the lines: "They blasted the bedrock and laid all the blacktop, Like a snake 'round the shoulders of God, Christ on his hilltop and the cop at the truck stop, Are both only doing their jobs."

Fiction has been known to imitate real life, and vice versa. In *Diana Jones* Jonathan has taken the name of his partner in the duo ByrdJones and created a racy and believable tale of unattainable love that culminates in heartbreak and death. *Coyote* and the ensuing *Soldier's Lullaby* are, respectively, the shortest tracks here at a tad over two minutes each. In the motion-filled lyric to the former a coyote is portrayed prowling across the landscape, while the narrator in the latter reports that some soldiers are singing by a moonlit river. Byrd's fifth solo collection closes with a melodic snapshot of Galveston.

Recorded in just four days, the haunting stripped-down sound on *The Law And The Lonesome* reflects the bleak landscapes – topographical and emotional – that form the backdrop for much of the action.

www.waterbug.com

Arthur Wood