



Richard Dobson **“On Thistledown Wind”** Brambus Records

Let's begin with the front page of the liner booklet and the picture which graces it. At first glance, what you appear to see is the flowering head of a thistle resplendent with seed spores [+]. They're ready and willing to take flight when the next wind happens to brush past. Look a little closer, however – in fact look beyond the thistle, and you'll see Don Ricardo smiling straight at you. Recorded by Thomm Jutz in his Nashville home studio – Jutz relocated from Germany to the Country Music Capital a few years back - this is their fourth consecutive collaboration as co-producers. It's also the first album that Richard has recorded in the States since **“Salty Songs”** back in 1998.

There's a Bo Diddley feel to the rhythm that launches the goodtime opening cut, and in a feisty mood Richard urges his sweetheart to join him in kicking up her heels. As *“Come On Baby, Let's Dance”* evolves, Dobson invokes the spectre of politics with *“The monkey's in control, Over here, over there, It's all the same you know, Monkey see, monkey do.”* Reference the latter lyric quote Dobson has resided in Switzerland for a number of years. In tandem with plying his trade as a journeyman musician, a few decades back Dobson occasionally took to the seas off the coast of his native Texas, to work on shrimp boats or on oil-rigs. *“The Ballad Of Harpoon Barry”* recalls one his acquaintances from that period, who “was in the wrong place at the wrong time” during the night-time of 15th September 2001 when a string of four laden barges, pushed by the Brown Water V tug, stuck a support pillar and took out sections of the Queen Isabella Causeway. The Causeway links South Padre Island to the Texas mainland, and Barry's vehicle plunged off the stricken causeway resulting in his death. Dobson's lyric fondly recalls, *“the peg legged surfer, an artist by trade”* as it was Harpoon Barry who tattooed a rose on Richard's arm.

The opening lines *“She Was Just A Little Crazy”* boil down to some give, and a little take – *“You couldn't call her pretty, She had troubled eyes, She had a way about her, That was easy to like”* - as Dobson describes an assignation with a Houston woman who loved to sing the blues but always had a “far away look in her eyes.” In the closing verse Dobson asks why she later took her own life. The ballad paced *“On Thistledown Wind”* is a seasonal song that draws on warm Indian Summer memories during the slumbering frosty months of winter. Dobson initially recalls his quality of life in previous decades and goes on to reflect in *“The Infidel”* that ‘here and now’ may not be the best of times. You see there are too many spin-doctors selling cures, and Richard astutely adds *“But the truth is no one really knows the answer, The truth is that the truth is hard to find.”*

The rowdy *“Red Headed Woman”* features a support vocal from David Olney, and is followed by the gently paced *“Queen Of My Heart”* in which Dobson praises his sweetheart in tandem with describing some favourite facets of the natural world including the dawn, the fact that *“I have yet to hear the rival of a mocking bird's song,”* witnessing a hawk hanging in the wind and more. The up-tempo *“Scissortail Bird”* maintains the latter environmental theme, while *“Down Along The Reeperbahn”* is, ironically considering the scenario that unfolds, a happy-go-lucky road number that recalls the proverbial gig from hell when no one turned to hear Dobson play in a Hamburg club. In the cold light of morning Dobson pounds the pavement of the city's red light district and recalls the time when *“the Beatles used to play”* in the local clubs, and observes the present day with *“the winos were just waking, mumbling and dazed, Working on their first beer, I was feeling about the same.”*

Subtitled *“[A Song For the Muse],”* *“Month Of Mondays”* is a paean to the spirit that guides the hands of those who would create art, while *“Slave To The Restless Wind”* eulogises the life of the restless traveller who forever seeks new horizons. The closing cut *“New Morning Song”* also bears a subtitle, namely *“[Om Mani Padme Hung].”* The latter is probably the best-known Buddhist chant [+], and

according to Richard's liner notes can be defined as "*We should look for the light within us, not the other way around.*" It's hardly surprising that, musically speaking, the latter song bears a gospel feel.

Apart from Jutz, "**On Thistledown Wind**" sees Dobson joined, musically in Music City Tennessee, by a few "locally based" friends. There's two Blue Moon Orchestra alumni Pat McInerney [drums, percussio] and his wife LeAnn Ethridge [bass, vocals], and apart from the aforementioned vocal singer/songwriter David Olney blows harmonica on a couple of cuts. Long time associate and touring companion Mark "Sergio" Webb, as usual, picks some fine guitar, while Tom Russell Band alumni Fats Kaplin shines on fiddle, pedal steel and accordion. Brent Moyer blows his trumpet on "Come On Baby, Let's Dance" and "Down Along The Reeperbahn" and there are harmony vocals from solo artist Catherine [Cathryn?] Craig and Knoxville based dentist, Mark Barker.

Note.

[+] – The technical name, it appears, is pappus.

[*] – A much deeper, more detailed explanation of the mantra is given on the web site <http://www.tibet.com/Buddhism/om-mantra.html>

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 03/06.