



Greg Brown “In The Hills Of California” Red House Records

Brown opens this 2CD recording with a reading of “For All,” a short poem that can be summed up as an evocation of wandering the beautiful vast wilderness of Turtle Island [*]. “For All” was written by the San Francisco born poet, Gary Snyder. Brown’s usual accompanist, Bo Ramsey, doesn’t appear on these live recordings made at the Kate Wolf Music Festival [1997 through 2003]. Instead, Greg is supported on guitar, from time to time, by Kate’s long-time road partner Nina Gerber, as well as Garnet Rogers and Pete Heitzman. Adding further instrumental colour to the proceedings is another of Kate’s associates Bill Griffin [mandolin], plus Dave Moore [harmonica] and Karen Savoca [percussion]. Vocally, Shawn Colvin assists on “Say A Little Prayer.”

Across the thirty-two cuts, there’s eighteen musical selections from Greg’s extensive catalogue of studio albums, all the way from “Wash My Eyes” and the aforementioned “Say A Little Prayer” [on the 1988 release **“One More Goodnight Kiss”**] through to “You Town Now” and a rowdy rendition of “InaBell Sale” that leaves the audience begging for more [from the Y2K album **“Over And Under”**]. It’s worth noting that the latter is one of a quartet of cuts on this release highlighted in the liner booklet as *“contains adult language,”* the others being “Almost Out Of Gas,” the insight into the life of a travelling musician “More Allison Played Here,” and “Slow Food.” The only previously available recording of “Slow Food,” appeared on the radio station compilation **“WERU’s First CD”** [1997]. Other cuts featured on this double disc set that originally appeared on compilation recordings are “Lullaby” from the 1999 Greg Brown instigated charity CD **“Solid Heart,”** plus a cover of Kate’s “Tequila And Me” that Brown performed with Ferron on the Red House Records celebration of Wolf’s music **“Treasures Left Behind: Remembering Kate Wolf.”**

“In The Hills Of California” includes ten tracks that appear, for the first time, on an official Greg Brown solo release and apart from the reading of the aforementioned Snyder poem and “Slow Food,” there’s four songs that were penned by the Iowan and an equivalent number of cover songs. The latter amount to Smokey Robinson’s “You Really Got A Hold On Me” [with vocal assistance from Savoca], the traditional “I Shall Not Be Moved,” Robert Johnson’s “Kind Hearted Woman Blues” and closing the second disc, “Don’t Let Me Down” by Lennon & McCartney [which also features a Karen Savoca support vocal]. As for those *new* Brown originals, he introduces a rendition of “Kate’s Guitar,” recorded at the 1997 festival, with the insight that he had written the song the previous evening. Nina Gerber who plays guitar on the cut, included the song on her debut solo album **“Not Before Noon”** [2001], and Brown shared the vocal duties on that occasion. “Livin’ In A Prayer” was recorded in 2000, the love song “The Way My Baby Calls My Name” dates from the 2003 festival, while from the same year the verbally punchy “I Want My Country Back” – *“Oh, but I don’t feel at home here anymore”* - is a message directed at those who govern the American nation.

Among the already familiar Brown songs appearing on this collection are “Lord I Have Made A Place In My Heart” and the title cut from **“The Poet Game”** [1994], “China” from **“Further In”** [1996], and from **“Covenant”** [2000] “Rexroth’s Daughter.” Proceeds from the sale of this recording will help fund the work of the Jugabandi Program, a *“Music and Arts as Education”* project that operates out of California’s Sebastopol Community Centre.

Note.

[*] – Turtle Island is the name for America that pervades Native American mythology.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood

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