

should not imply however, that Pam and Lorrie are covering crusty old ground. This is an album that is relevant for today and you know in your gut that this music really matters to them. **Alan Cackett**

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Amanda Shires DOWN FELL THE DOVES

Lightning Rod
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★★★☆☆

A game of two halves. One electrically powered the other semi-acoustic

Amanda Shires (vocals, fiddle, ukulele) is accompanied by husband Jason Isbell (electric guitar), plus, from his 400 Unit—Jimbo Hart (bass) and Chad Gamble (drums). Produced by Andy LeMaster (Bright Eyes, R.E.M.) the sessions took place at his Chase Park Transduction studio in Athens, Georgia. Amanda's lyrics have, in the past, journeyed to dark places where she has indulged in black humour.



That aspect remains intact here, although when Isbell's guitar grates and/or howls, the nuances in Amanda's vocal delivery suffer. For proof compare the melodic *A Song For Leonard Cohen* with the electric storms *Devastate* and *Wasted And Rollin'*.

Shires' previous outing *CARRYING LIGHTNING* included *Love Be A Bird* and *Ghostbird*, the latter sonically hinting at the approach taken here. Opening with the percussive and strident *Look Like A Bird*, the narrator dreams of being: 'careless, weightless and free.' Amanda was gifted a Siberian tiger claw in real life. It's claimed to bring the owner good luck and protective powers, leading the *Bulletproof* narrator to query if she's impervious to: 'bows and arrows, hatchets and hammers, bandoliers full of ammo' and more. 'Shots from a gun' and 'carbon monoxide in the garage' are among the possible methods of dealing death in the 'beautiful dream' that is *Box Cutters*. Set in the underworld, *Deep Dark Below* relates how the devil bows his fiddle with a bone.

Thankfully *If I*, at just over two minutes the album's shortest selection, is sonically a stripped-down less intrusive affair, wherein the 'guilty' narrator poses the double-edged question 'If I were to break a promise that I made...would you really want me to come clean?' Shires and Chad Fisher (trombone) arranged the horns on the melodically languid love ode *Stay*. According to the press release Shires wrote *A Song For Leonard Cohen*, 'as an exercise on his birthday.' The Lubbock bred musician has a verse of Cohen's *Hallelujah* tattooed on her forearm. In *A Song* the narrator imagines an alcohol fuelled evening: 'At the end of the night I'd conveniently misplace my wallet, and you'd wind up buying mine' followed by a leisurely stroll with the poet where: 'I'll just listen as you talk.' Underpinned by Shires' ghostly sounding fiddle, and the repetition: 'Oh what a mess he made,' the album title surfaces in the lyric to the darkly hued album closer *The Garden Song*. **Arthur Wood**

www.amandashiresmusic.com

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their beautiful debut album

red bird sky

'definitely one to look out for this summer'
whisperin'andhollerin

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'I am completely in love with this' - *gashouse radio*

see them at Moseley Folk Festival 30th Aug

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