



Greg Trooper **"Floating"** Sugar Hill Records

I love the occasional injection of humour into my *world of music*, and checking the **"Floating"** liner I noted that this disc was recorded in Nashville at *Planet Of The Tapes*. Produced by Phil Madeira, who also took charge of Greg's **"Straight Down Rain"** [2001], *Tapes* is actually the name of Madeira's home studio. **"Floating"**, Trooper's Sugar Hill debut, features liner notes by long time Greg supporter, Steve Earle. They met in New York in 1986. In the text Earle claims to be extremely selective in the area of *song covers* [Townes, the Bobster, Broooce and Gram etc.] he performs, the conclusion being that he now includes the Trooper original, "Muhammad Ali [The Meaning Of Christmas]," in his live shows.

The support players on **"Floating"** very much reflect those on **"Straight Down Rain"** and include Ken Blevins [drums] – in truth, a Trooper associate since **"Everywhere"** [1992], Trooper's wife Claire Mullally [vocals], Dennis Holt [drums], Dave Jacques [bass], Steve Hindalong [perc. incl. frying pan] and of course, Madeira [keyboards, guitar, accordion]. Support is provided on the odd track by *guitar stars* - Buddy Miller and Will Kimbrough, while Compass Records solo artist Jake Armerding [fiddle, mandolin] appears on four cuts, and stepping up to deliver the duet vocal on "Inisheer" [\*] is, appropriately, the County Claire *songbird* [and Sugar Hill label mate], Maura O'Connell.

John Sieger is a long time Trooper song collaborator and on this disc they co-wrote "Rose, With You," a tale of uncertain love – *"Tell me you'll always stay, I want you"* – a track that features Greg's wife on backing vocal. Claire and Greg have collaborated as writers before and on **"Floating"** it's the opening cut "The Road So Long," in which a weary traveller desperately searches for an old lover. Elsewhere, "When My Tears Break Through" was co-written with the estimable Buddy Mondlock, while hit writer Jenny Yates [#], Trooper's other *new* collaborator on this recording, shared in the creation of the closing track, "The Lasting Kind." Both love songs, the former features a narrator over burdened by worldly problems who remains dry eyed until *"you say you love and I know it's true, That's when my tears break through."* As for the love that's the subject of the closing lyric, it's one that *through good and bad* remains "The Lasting Kind."

The title cut is set on the banks of, and in the waters of, a river, as the narrator recalls how each summer he'd go "Floating" while *"Staring up at the sun while the water held me in my dreams."* That is, until the year that the body of a young girl was found of the banks, drained of blood. *"This was more than some teenage prank,"* is the narrator's conclusion. Based on the contents of the final verse there's the suggestion that, the narrator – along with the river - holds the answer to this unsolved mystery. Success in *"outrunning bandits," "playing roulette"* and countless other facets of everyday life are claimed in "Lucky That Way" - for love, that's a whole other matter. "Hummingbird" is a song about an old guitar that *"Daddy don't play no more,"* while "Apology," "From Only You" and "December Skies" are all relationship songs.

Rather than endlessly pursue fictional *"Streets of gold, pockets full of diamonds,"* a couple consider escaping to a simpler life on "Inisheer." The lyric concludes with the lines *"Might be a lie, just a dreamers notion, But if we try then we can never fail."* I mentioned "Muhammad Ali [The Meaning Of Christmas]" at the outset of this review. The lyric recalls a number of pivotal episodes from the sporting life of the "Louisville Lip," although definition of the song title hangs upon more recent times, and a tv appearance where *"His hands were shaking, His knees were weak."* On that show Ali delivers, with a grin, his lifelong mantra, *"I am the greatest."* Trooper concludes that, *"he was talking about you, Not about him, And was*

*teaching me the meaning of Christmas.*” Whether “*you*” in the latter quote is God, I’ll leave open to your interpretation.....like Steve, I’ve already made my decision.

**Note.**

[\*] – Inisheer or Inis Oírr, lies very close to the County Clare coastline. The easternmost and also the smallest of the Aran Islands, it is also thought to be the most beautiful.

[#] – Yates has penned songs for Garth Brooks, Dan Seals and Kathy Mattea.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood

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