



Cris Cuddy "**Come Along Carmelita**" no label

Figuratively speaking, the word "*kaleidoscope*" is defined in the Concise Oxford English Dictionary as a "*constantly changing group of bright or interesting objects.*" For me Cris Cuddy's "**Come Along Carmelita**" is a kaleidoscope of musical styles and features numerous concoctions of sound, while employing [track to track] a vast panorama of lyrical subjects. The aforementioned musical styles lean predominantly toward roots music influences, although "The Beginning Of The End" comes off as a smooth and smoky, late night, jazz inflected ballad ala Hoagy Carmichael and Irving Berlin. Frankly, the song could easily have been penned in the nineteen-twenties or thirties.

The disc opens with the Tex Mex flavoured paean of love to the "The Checkout Girl." The late Doug Sahm would have been proud to put his name to the foregoing track. There's a nightmarish and dark side to the *turn of the [twentieth] century* tale contained within "Lyin' In My Dreams." Hanged and buried for a crime that isn't specifically identified, the poor, illiterate narrator dreams of family members who went north to a city where the "*streets is lined with gold.*" Anyone familiar with the ballroom scene in Michael Cimino's 1980 cinematic masterpiece "**Heaven's Gate,**" should grasp my point when I say that Cuddy's waltz, "Queen of the Ball," would have fitted that segment of the movie like a glove. The vital *first sighting* is captured simply in the lyric with the [opening] lines, "*I was under your spell from the moment I saw you, On the steps of the Wainwright Hotel.*"

A highly percussive opening fifteen seconds sets the tone for "Henry Morgan The Pirate," a ballad moulded in the seafaring song tradition that has been *spiked* with a modern-day lyrical twist. Truth to tell, this Cuddy composition could be interpreted on two levels. The first is that it's a great story song, but the lyric is also a subtle and stinging take on modern day business ethics – or, at least, the significant lack of any. You see Henry sent his fine son to finishing school *to "study business ways,"* and now Junior is in charge of the family finances. These days he's "*a toff, a veritable tycoon*" who is "*a pirate in the modern world, stealing all he can*" while bedecked in "*a business suit instead of pantaloons.*"

Cuddy revisits the Tex Mex border sounds in the album title track, while "Way Out West" is a tribute written for, and about, modern day journeymen cowboys – "*there's no hidden treasure and hard work is the measure*" – while the tune lopes along at an easy going pace. Although the nature of the business of the "*two big and swarthy guys*" in "What If Frankie Doesn't Like It" isn't precisely stated, they are without doubt gangsters. As the story unfolds it becomes apparent that the pair have been somewhat generous with regard to the disposal of their boss's money on their own personal enjoyment. Contemplating their fate, they recall tales of how Frankie has, in the past, taken folks "*for a ride*" that included "*swimming*" as well as the purchase of "*a brand new pair of shoes.*" Cris doesn't have to mention the shoes would be composed of *cement*. The forty-second long violin solo that introduces the latter song possesses a classical music feel, and appeared as a track titled "A Moment With Heather" credited to the Cris Cuddy Ensemble on Mickey Newbury's 2001 album "**The Long Road Home.**" As for the closing cut, "Two Of A

Kind," it initially possesses an Eastern European/Russian feel and later evolves into a slow ballad about a pair of life's losers who meet in a hotel bar. One of the pair, the narrator, ponders in the closing line - "*Were you ever there at all.*"

The support players include former Tom Russell Band member and latterly a sideman with the Dead Reckoning crew, Fats Kaplin, Rusty McCarthy [guitar] who has worked with the *too long invisible* Mary Margaret O'Hara, and from Toronto's The Henrys, Don Rooke [guitar]. Kaplin's violin, mandolin and accordion prominently feature on most of the cuts.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 12/02