



Claudia Schmidt NEW WHIRLED ORDER (Album Review) Red House Records

Possessed of one of those Collins/Koloc/Hills pure-folk singing voices, Schmidt re-emerges with her NEW WHIRLED ORDER

The 2012 Claudia Schmidt compilation BEND IN THE RIVER: COLLECTED SONGS contained sixteen selections from the handful of albums that this Michigan bred singer/songwriter had recorded for the Minneapolis based Red House Records between 1987 – 2000. Claudia debuted as a recording artist in 1979 with a self-titled set on the late Bruce Kaplan's, now defunct, Chicago based, Flying Fish Records. Post 2000 Schmidt independently released a few albums, including EVIDENCE OF HAPPINESS (2012) her third collaboration with long-time musician buddy Sally Rogers. The recording sessions for the latter took place, a few miles from the latter's home, at Mark Thayer's Signature Sounds Recording in Pomfret, Connecticut.

Obviously enamoured by Thayer's set-up NEW WHIRLED ORDER was recorded there. On the sessions Claudia (vocals, 12 string guitar, mountain dulcimer) was supported by long-time collaborator Dean Magraw (acoustic/electric guitars) plus Richard Gates (electric bass), Tim Griffin (drums), Chris Haynes (piano, accordion) and Betsy Doriss (oboe). Production of NEW WHIRLED ORDER is credited to Schmidt, Magraw and Thayer, and the album closes with a heartfelt memorial to her mother, Jane, who passed in 2013. In the liner booklet Claudia writes *"I offer this collection in memory of my mom, Jane Schmidt, who was my fiercest fan and very present on this journey."* In the same liner note Claudia refers to the recording sessions as *"a healing time"* and further muses *"Once upon a time there was a new Red House recording project. Musicians came together, some old friends, some newly met, and the journey began. The songs took shape, changed, and changed again as they were explored and listened to, altered and tweaked. It was a humbling and breathtaking experience."*

Schmidt's (music) career was in slumber mode for over a decade, during which time with her husband she ran a bed and breakfast on an island in Lake Michigan. Continuing to write, and occasionally perform and record, when her marriage ended Claudia relocated to Minneapolis. The release of the slyly-titled, thirteen-song NEW WHIRLED ORDER confirms Claudia's re-emergence as a full-time singer/songwriter. The Red House press release reveals that, divorce and the loss of her mother apart, Claudia's new songs were inspired by phrase *"There are only two feelings: love and fear"* in A COMMON PRAYER Australian Michael Leunig's 1990 book of prayers and cartoons. Further describing her latest album, she continued *"I've never sung so unabashedly about love; fear was never a problem!"*

Schmidt's multi-octave, crystal-clear voice soars and swoops on the opening song *Already*, a spirited paean to rediscovery. Replete with accordion support and an intricate Magraw guitar solo, in the closing line the narrator urges the listener to *"Kick that door wide open, my*

friend...cause that's what love is for." Doriss' oboe weaves in and out of the gentler paced, image-filled *Sea Of Forgiveness*; the narrator's dreams torn asunder, she reflects "*Sometimes everything just turns out wrong.*" The lines "*I'll stay here the whole damn day, Free of schedules, worries, and words*" encapsulate the theme underpinning *Nothing*. Almost hymn-like in execution, Dean Magraw/Claudia Schmidt co-wrote the three-verse *Dawn Star* – "*Take time, take heed, take heart, you need not fear the darkness, Our love will hold you close and guide you toward the Dawn Star.*" Schmidt ratchets up the tempo a few notches for the bitter *Coward In The Face Of Love*, and follows with the gentler semi-spoken *Longing* a paean to "*the unsaid*" in our conversations.

Almost certainly based on bitter as well as sweet experience, countless shades of love permeate the *Likes Of You* lyric. On *My Defences Are Down* Schmidt and Magraw indulge in jazz vocal and guitar extemporisation, the ensuing and urgent *Strong Woman Has A Bad Day Polka* is liberally laced with lyrical humour, while the *Out Here* narrator seeks resolution. Argentinean born jazz pianist, singer and composer, the late Sergio Mihanovich (d. 2012) penned *Sometime Ago* half-a-century ago. Here on this marriage of vocal and scat singing, Claudia employs her own lyric supported by the jazz-inspired, piano-led melody. Accompanied by guitar and oboe the penultimate and wordless *Jane's Gone (For My Mom, 1922-2013)* finds Schmidt vocally bidding farewell to an adored parent, and it's followed by the acapella, ninety-second long *Jane's A-round*. Sung by Claudia, (husband and wife) Howie Bursen and Sally Rogers, and friend Jeff Davis, the repeated "*We're born, we live, we die, we're gone, but love goes on and on*" peaks and slowly fades into infinity.....just as, one day, we all will.

<http://www.claudiaschmidt.com/> and <http://www.redhousetrecords.com/Schmidt.html>

From the desk of the Folk Villager

Tags : Claudia Schmidt, Dean Magraw, Signature Sounds, Mark Thayer, Red House, Flying Fish, Bruce Kaplan,

aka Arthur Wood.

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