

Unsettled Down



Alana Levandoski

Alana Levandoski **"Unsettled Down"** Rounder Records

In recent years America's larger independent roots music labels have displayed a penchant for signing acts from north of the 49th parallel, cases in point being Juno [+] winners Blue Rodeo, The Wailin' Jennys, David Francey and Lynn Miles, plus recent nominees The Bills and Kathleen Edwards. A mid-twenty something, Levandoski, who hails from the prairies of Manitoba, is Rounder's latest addition to its Canadian coterie and the ten-song folk/country flavoured **"Unsettled Down"** is her debut solo recording.

While a number of scribes have invoked Nanci Griffith's name, and her **"There's A Light...."** recording of the late nineteen-seventies, in an attempt to highlight to readers the sound of Levandoski's voice in flight, on the biographical opening cut, "Red Haired Girl," I'd offer Iris Dement as a reference point. When I used the word "biographical" in the previous sentence, it wasn't in reference to Alana's life, but rather that of her mother's during the nineteen sixties. It appears that Alana's maternal grandfather suffered from a weak heart, due to a childhood bout of rheumatic fever, while, as the lyric reveals, her mother Kathy's oldest brother, Ronnie, at the tender age of eighteen, was mown down by a *"driver's drunken eyes."* Going on to trace how the "Red Haired Girl" left home, returned home, eventually married and raised a family, ultimately it's a song about our innate ability to survive crisis and move on.

"I've Seen Your Eyes" finds the narrator [Levandowski] following in the footsteps of an [older?] acquaintance – to the canals of Venice, the Temple of Zeus [Olympia, Greece], and Turkey's capital city and more, while in "Bring Me On Home" Alana delivers the kiss-off to a former lover with *"And if sorry don't cut it with you....then I'm sorry."* The lines *"By the time I looked in my rear-view mirror, The skyline of the city was gone"* confirm that her own life is the principal canvas from which she paints with words. Levandoski lived for a number of years in Winnipeg, but last year returned to the small town of Kelwood, her "ancestral" home on the prairie. Having just plunged the knife into the male of the species [in "Bring Me On Home"], in "Moonshine" which immediately follows, all gussied up and sat in a smoky bar with a bottle of beer already in her hand Levandoski delivers the stinging ultimatum, *"Tonight this flower needs a lot of moonshine, But what it don't need is a man."*

A testament to living and growing up in a rural environment, and eventually leaving it, the hook in "Prairie Sun" runs to *"A prairie town has the heart of a workin' horse, Gotta have your hands in the dirt to stay on course"* while *"And whatever you've done, gets purged in the plough"* alludes to the rural religious edict that past sins can be atoned for by indulging in hard manual labour. Pursuing, further, a quasi-religious theme, and featuring a female gospel chorus, the upbeat "Jezebel's Ringin'" opens with the image of *"I can hear the Jezebels ringin', From the stone cut carven church."* As for the bridge [in this song], that runs to the summation *"O my Saviour, O my Saviour, Find me unsettled down"* – which could, I guess, be directed skyward or at her latest beau. The melodically laid back "I Ain't No Saint," which follows, completes this loosely thematic trilogy with an admission by Levandoski, at the outset, that *"My dreams have gone to seed,"* while the later invocation *"And my grave awaits my body, But it don't await me soul"* appears a somewhat premature testimony for this twenty something, as yet, *unsettled down* woman. Although Levandoski goes on to question if she'll ever find love, an olive branch is held out in *"And the child in me is awake, So my riches you can take, And for all the world's sake, Let's dance forever more."*

The focus of "Don't You Remember" is the precious memories that the narrator retains of former lovers, while "Sold Your Wings" homes in on one particular past affair and its aftermath. The album closer "Misty Sea" features another love themed lyric, one whose focus is parting. In terms of lyrical commonality,

“Red Headed Girl” and “Prairie Sun” mention the United Kingdom city of “*London*,” while the consecutive pairing “Jezebel’s Ringin” and “I Ain’t No Saint” contain regal allusions to crowns and thrones. As for the closing pair of “Sold Your Wings” and “Misty Sea,” both lyrics reference flight with the word “*wings*,” albeit that, in the former song title, one of the protagonists is now incapable of sustaining flight. Where I found, to date, fellow Rounder newcomer Kathleen Edwards’ two outings to be lyrically facile, what can be said about Levandoski’s biographical approach to lyric writing is that, at least, it is based on real life experience. We may have to wait till episodes two or three until Alana delivers goose-bump inducing stories and tunes, but for the time being “**Unsettled Down**” is a creditably promising debut.

Note.

[+] – The Juno is the Canadian equivalent of America’s music industry Grammy.

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 01/06.