



Ray Wylie Hubbard "**Growl**" Rounder/Philo Records

Freelance writer Richard Skanse's liner notes give a comprehensive explanation of the *sea change* that occurred in Hubbard's approach to writing, somewhere between "**Crusades Of The Restless Knights**" [1999] and "**Eternal And Lowdown**" [2001]. The bottom line being "*the boy done got the blues.*" An integral part of Skanse's notes relate to the *remaining parts* of a 1930's Regal resonator guitar that Ray Wylie found in an Arkansas music store a few years back. It was being used as a planter !!!!! Purchased, sans the plants, and rebuilt by luthier Tony Nobles, a neat segue connects "**Growl**" and "**Eternal And Lowdown**." If you check the rear tray picture of latter disc, propped against the wall is the resonator, and what is resting in the man's lap on the main liner picture of "**Growl**" – hell, it's the same darned axe. Hubbard has a new *ju ju charm*. What's more that *musical ju ju* to countless roots players, Gurf Morlix, produced both collections. Strike two.....

The word *growl* means to utter a gruff and intentionally aggressive sound. It could also express anger. I don't detect any overt hostility in Hubbard's lyrics, on any of the eleven "**Growl**" cuts, although he occasionally displays some displeasure at the way things are with the world. "*Our corporations well they are corrupt, And our politicians are swindlers and loco.*" Mind you one of the pillars on which Hubbard built his career, was creating the impression that he was pissed [*]. The thing that was always unsettling, was the consistently devilish twinkle in his eye.

Developing the premise that knives made in Spain would probably be "*lethally sharp*," in "The Knives of Spain," the opening cut [no pun intended !!!], by way of giving the latter allusion a poetic connotation, Hubbard states in the closing lines of the first verse "*I'd make the words in the refrain, As lethal as the knives of Spain.*" Hubbard goes on to assert how he'd take "*black cat's bones*" down to Antone's [the legendary Austin blues club], where "*I'd steal what I really need, I'd take it home and I'd let it bleed,*" and "*in the night when I'm by myself, I'd take what it was down from the shelf.*" My take is that "*what it was*" is nothing more and nothing less than musical inspiration.

"**Growl**" is chock full of *potentially* personal references, as well as mention of present day members of the roots music community, mainly residents of Austin. The "No Lie" is that "*I got to quit getting' high,*" and in verse two apart from being arrested on 4th of July – "*something about my conduct,*" Ray goes on to relate how "*I went downtown to try to find Mr. Foley, He's an ornery son of a bitch, but his songs is almost holy.*" Mr. Foley is of course Austin's *duct tape messiah* who was gunned down 14 years ago. It may seem intentional [but wasn't – in fact, speaking personally, I feel that it's rather spooky], that the tribute album "**Songs For Blaze, A Friend Of Ours**" is reviewed elsewhere in this issue of Folkwax. As for "No Lie," is it autobiographical ? All I'll say is that by mentioning the *archangel* Foley, Hubbard has historically set this song in the "*outlaw's outlaw*" period of his life that Skanse alludes to in the liner notes. In fact before the track is done, Hubbard has dropped the names of Mississippi Fred McDowell in relation to the gospel classic "Jesus Is On The Mainline," while "*Ms Williams tells me that Jesus turned the water into wine*" is a reference to the cut "You R Loved" on Victoria Williams album "**Loose**" [1994].

Which brings us, strangely, to a track titled "Name Droppin'." And this is where that darned *twinkle in Ray's eye* I mentioned earlier, comes into play. Verse on verse, chronologically Hubbard not only *name drops* five musicians, but also defines their life skills. First up is solo artist John Dee Graham [and in the final line "*Willie*" – Nelson ?], then fiddle player Darcie Deaville, ex Loose Diamond Scrappy Jud Newcomb [now an album producer, and essential sideman to Austin's blues goddess, Toni Price, and others], and finally, singer/songwriter Mary Gauthier. The final verse is dedicated to the late, Mambo

John Teanor, who sadly succumbed to cancer in August 2001. Along with Newcomb, during his final years, Treanor was a member *Austin supergroup*, The Resentments and also regularly sat in at Price's Tuesday night *happy hour* extravaganza. If Foley was the *duct tape messiah*, then Treanor's trademark was his *road kill head attire*. As for Messrs. Graham, Deaville, Newcomb and Gauthier all of them can be heard singing and/or playing on the cut. Ray, you're such a tease.....what's more, every piece of this song fits. Perfectly.

There's a Tom Russell/Tom Pacheco co-write titled "Purgatory Road" on Russell's "**Box Of Visions**" [1993], while on "**Growl**" Ray sets his own imprint on the title, by way of describing numerous aspects of hardship on the socially deprived "Road." For "Bones" read *dice*, and the story then runs to "*Daddy comes in in a gabardine suit say, 'Go fire up the rocket,' He throws me the keys to the 88,*" as he's off to shake them bones, because "*baby needs a new pair of shoes.*" Ray's blues n' religion paeon, "Preacher," can be summed up by the conclusive "*He talked a whole lot but didn't have much to say,*" while "Rooster" is an uptempo blues in which the narrator forgoes his "*life of crime*" for one with a guitar and "*some money in a jar.*"

Not only were Ray's twinkling when he penned the lyric to, "Rock-N-Roll Is A Vicious Game," his tongue must have been firmly lodged in his cheek. Hell, Hubbard was also smirking. It's outrageously satirical, and it's honest, sarcastic and filled with more truth than most music biz folk would care to handle in a matter of only four minutes. A total slam dunk. A cut of cuts later, "Screw You, We're From Texas," the album closer, ploughs a similar furrow - somewhere between truth, honesty and humour. I guess the latter cut could be construed as an earnest attempt to finally put "Up Against The Wall" to rest. In the lyric, Ray *name drops* numerous *legendary* Texas places of musical interest [sic. Stubb's, Gruene Hall and once again, Antone's] and some of the state's more colourful characters ["*Willie Nelson, Robert Earl Keen and me*"]. Ray, in the light of "Screw You," I would however advise caution - don't ever perform in Delaware on Friday 13th as I have this really bad feeling.....

Ray might be pumping out blues riffs these days, but the poetic mother lode that he struck on "**Loco Gringo's Lament**" [1994] remains as deep and as rich ever. What's more, Ray even plucks that old 1930 resonator on a couple of these new cuts.....

Note.

[*] – That's "*pissed*" as in cross or irate.

Folkwax Rating 10 out of 10

Arthur Wood

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