



Jack Hardy **"Bandolier"** Great Divide Records

The sepia tinted main liner picture features Jack wearing a Stetson with his guitar slung from a neck strap, leaning against a tree at the Camp Coho site on the Quiet Valley Ranch, Kerrville, Texas. Hell, I'd recognise that just *out of focus* perimeter wire fence behind Jack anytime. As for the album title *bandolier* is defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as a "*shoulder-belt with loops or pockets for cartridges.*" Poetically speaking, Jack's fifteen [original] songs could be the *cartridges* with which you could fill those *empty loops*.

That I chose to include *Texas*, *Stetson* and *bandolier* in the foregoing paragraph was intentional since this album, at least thematically and geographically, marks a change of direction for Hardy. Gone is the *Celtic music* influence that has been his trademark for countless years and recordings. **"Bandolier"** marks an almost 360 degree change of direction, as Hardy returns to the *Country folk* styling that informed his early career releases.

Jack dedicates this album to his late brother Jeff Hardy [March 31, 1955 – September 11, 2001], with the words – *brother, bass player and bodyguard*. In the wake of 911 it appears that Hardy wrote a slew of songs concerning the cataclysm [*]. The thought did occur to me that in order to *break that chain*, Jack began composing this radically and subjectively different suite of themed songs. The fact that two of them, "Ponderosa" and "Autumn," were performed by Hardy when he won the Songwriters Contest at the May 2001 Wildflower Folk Festival held in Richardson, Texas only confirms that the contents of this disc have been in gestation for a couple of years at least. And long before 911....so much for my grand theory !!!

"The Moon Is Full," the opening cut, explores the possibility that the moon can exert influence upon us mortals. In this instance, it's an urge to desert a loved one and go wandering the highways and byways. The [fantasy ?] love song, "Ponderosa" is set among the line cabins and nether regions of a vast ranch, and lyrically merges *true life* images – "*barbed wire and blankets and a steel horseshoe*" and *poetic* similes - "*with the wind so bold and the frost a knife.*" While "Ponderosa" is the first song to visit the borderland between America and Mexico, Jack returns to the region in the *obviously* titled "All The Way To Mexico." Featuring "*four brothers, five saddles and one black guitar*" the old west image of wayward gunplay - "*tin cans a-flyin*" - introduces us to this *wild bunch* as they ride south to retrieve their brother who left in pursuit of a "*dark-skinned woman.*"

Only in the short final verse do the words of the otherwise optimistic "Texas Moon" become bitter and also rational, concerning a *love affair* that lasted one *short* night. In the process, the song reveals the narrator's innocence. I guess it was the line "*music loud and clear that you'll never hear on the radio*" that revealed the location of this encounter, plus the knowledge that *the Kerrville serendipity* possesses the power to bemuse the unwary. "Faded Old Rose" and "Autumn" are by way of seasonal love songs, while "Andale" [translates as *Come On*], which is set in a small North Texas town, retains that underlying boy/girl theme. I can only surmise that Jack meant the song title to be interpreted as *come on*, thereby giving it a double meaning, although the invitational [and clever] couplet "*late night barroom, bedroom eyes, inviting you to break your fast*" possibly led me to that conclusion.

The words used in the album title cut are dark and gritty, and as each verse evolves they paint a picture of impending violence and death. In fact the line "*there's no clean way to die that the women won't cry, when it spreads like a dark ruby stain*" hints at a bloodbath of epic proportions, although the precise, historic event is not identified. The latter cut brings to mind the writing of El Paso resident, Cormac McCarthy. Although no names are mentioned, "Dead Man's Hand" set in Deadwood, South Dakota retells the *real life* revenge murder of "Wild Bill" Hickock [real name James Butler Hickock] on August 2, 1876 by James

McCall. Shot in the back of the head while playing poker, at the time Hickcock was reputedly holding pairs of aces and eights, which have since become known as a *“dead man’s hand.”* While that historic *gambling death* may be the foundation for the song, Hardy goes on to proffer advice on how to live a full life *“one step ahead of the revenue man, one card short of a dead man’s hand.”*

“Rodeo” and “The Roan” take their inspiration from the possession of equine excellence. The former, really a paean to the transitory nature of daily life, reveals *“I remember my first go, Fallin’ off did not take long,”* while the latter is a story song set in Utah with the narrator in hot pursuit of a *“wild, unruly mare”* through the *“cold-hearted”* desert. Jack must have been in a humorous frame of mind, with a devilish twinkle in his eye, when penning “Everything’s Bigger In Texas.” In the closing of line of verse one he hits you with the revelation that *“too much Corona you get lime disease”* and in the chorus adds *“everything’s bigger in Texas, Including this dang hangover.”* Seems to me that Jack hasn’t learned that too much Corona mixed with those Camp Coho blue margaritas will do that to you. Mining for further humorous gems, Hardy, tongue firmly in cheek, goes on to divulge *“there used to be a bridge to this song, it got washed away in the deluge.”* Appropriately, “The Singer’s Lament,” the final cut, is a song of parting and a fitting closer to this fine collection of Hardy originals.

The support players on **“Bandolier”** are Tom Duval (guitar, vocals), Jenny Hersch (bass), Kate MacLeod (fiddle), Steve Sadler (dobro, mandolin) and Mike Laureanno (vocals).

Note.

[*] A couple of Jack’s 911 songs are featured on the various artist compilation **“Vigil.”** Sale of this album benefits 911 charities.

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood
Kerrville Kronikles 02/03