



Willie Nelson "Willie Nelson & Friends, Stars & Guitars [Live]" Lost Highway Records

According to the official web page at <http://www.usanetwork.com/specials/willienelson/>, this *all-star* concert was held at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium on Sunday 14th April 2002. The Lost Highway liner claims that the date was Monday 27th May 2002. When Lost Highway Records repress the disc and reprint the liner, I suggest they check their facts. Prior to its release on CD, a twenty-one song version of the show was aired Stateside on television. This eighteen-song recording opens with the Willie and Sheryl Crow duet "Whiskey River," a cut that wasn't featured on the television show. Also omitted from this disc are the contributions from Dave Matthews ["Funny How Time Slips Away"], John Hiatt ["Most Unoriginal Sin"] and the Dixie Chicks ["Bloody Mary Morning"] plus the Keith Richard, Sheryl and Willie take on "The Worst." By the way, the foregoing web site still maintains that there are no plans to issue the show on CD or DVD "*at this time.*" Once there was a time.....when that was a factual statement.

Nelson's most recent studio effort "**The Great Divide**," released in January 2002, included a number of duets with artists from a wide range of musical genres. On this collection, Nelson and Rob Thomas reprise the Matchbox Twenty lead singer's composition "Maria (Shut Up And Kiss Me)," this time with assistance from jazz legend, Bill Evans. From the same collection, Lee Ann Womack and Willie perform "Mendocino County Line" [#], while soul singer Brian McKnight revisits "Don't Fade Away," with help from Evans and Nelson.

Nelson is one of those rare individuals who is able to cross musical borders with, seemingly, consummate ease and on "**Willie Nelson & Friends, Stars & Guitars [Live]**," apart from the artists already mentioned, the *other* rock music contributors/collaborators amount to Jon Bon Jovi, Richie Sambora and Keith Richard. The country contingent consists of *oldsters* Emmylou Harris, Ray Price and Vince Gill, while the *alt. generation* is represented by Hank Williams III and Ryan Adams. Adams may be a *shooting* star in the latter genre, but New York City born 'n based, Norah Jones, who was raised in Texas, literally appeared out of nowhere to become a bona fide jazz *giant* during 2002. From her debut album "**Come Away With Me**," Jones and Nelson perform, appropriately, "Lonestar." Once upon a time, soul singers seemed to be everywhere. That said, the voice of Aaron Neville is nothing less than unique and the Hoagy Carmichael/Mitchell Paris collaboration "Stardust" benefits greatly from his contribution. Talking of things that are unique, Patty Griffin – is she a folkie ? is she a rocker ? she is definitely a classy singer/songwriter - possesses one of those *once heard, never forgotten* voices and, here, she duets on Willie's heartbreaking ballad "Angel Flying Too Close To The Ground." As for music genres not yet mentioned, Nelson and Lost Highway label-mate Ryan Adams take a pop at reggae star Jimmy Cliff's "The Harder They Come."

Where most of the tracks feature an all star Nashville house band, which gives the recording an overall *loose* feel, Willie and the Family close out the disc with stirring versions of Nelson's classic hit "On The Road Again" and Hank Sr.'s "Move It On Over." Come April 30th 2003, Willie will begin his 70th year.....and you'd hardly know it.

Note. [#] The studio version of the song was recently nominated for a Best Country Collaboration w/vocals Grammy and Best Country Song Grammy, while the album from which the song came, "**The Great Divide**," has been nominated for Best Country Album and Best Recording Package.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

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