



Mary Gauthier “**Mercy Now**” Lost Highway Records

Mary Gauthier cut and self-released her debut recording in 1997, aged 35, having spent close to two decades living in the underbelly of the American beast, a hinterland of drugs, booze, sex and whatever other excess your body cares to freely indulge in. There had been a high cost, and from the outset Gauthier claimed that it was a miracle she had survived. Many friends, she said, had not. To date, subjectively, her song lyrics have drawn almost exclusively on that dark period.....relating events while failing to offer any means of escape, or, simply and more sensibly, proffering the advice to never go there!

With fourth recordings to her name, “**Mercy Now**” was released in February 2005 by the appropriately named Lost Highway Records, Gauthier steps up to the plate for a major label. The Universal corporation owns the Lost Highway imprint. This is the second consecutive disc that Gauthier has cut in Austin, Texas at Rootball, Gurf Morlix’s home studio. In recent years Morlix has helmed the production of many classic folk/country singer/songwriter albums [Ray Wylie Hubbard, Slaid Cleaves, Troy Campbell], and in the process established a reputation second to none. Her debut and sophomore efforts were produced by Crit Harmon while Signature Sounds in the States and Munich Records in Europe were initial custodians of Gauthier’s, hot as hell, first Morlix album “**Filth And Fire.**”

The front cover of her debut disc “**Dixie Chicken**” portrayed a round-faced woman, and eight years on, while not exactly gaunt, there’s evidence of high cheekbones and a more svelte countenance on the front cover of “**Mercy Now.**” What began as a picture now appears to be a pose. A low-carb diet can do that for you. And what of the music? Is what she has to say all that unique? On recordings one through three it’s not so much that *the song* appeared to remain the same, as Gauthier’s gritty lyrical gospel displayed limited parameters.

Born and raised in the south, the bona fide source of her *down home* vocal twang, a Boston resident for a time, but now Nashville based, the musical fare is a little more varied on “**Mercy Now.**” With “Wheel Inside The Wheel” Gauthier joins a line of famous, and would like to be famous, songwriters who have been inspired to pen a tribute song to the late Dave Carter. Johnsmith’s “Friend Of The Coyote” remains the best by miles, while Gauthier’s effort evokes Carter’s unique way with combining words and their sound when spoken/sung. The cover songs in this set amount to the late Harlan Howard’s “Just Say She’s A Rhymer” and Fred Eaglesmith’s “Your Sister Cried.” The latter cut previously appeared on the 2003 tribute compilation “**Eaglesmith: The Songs Of Fred Eaglesmith.**” As for Gauthier originals, “Drop In A Bucket” c/w backing vocal from Patty Griffin is a bitter “*hey-I’m-out-of-love-and-oh-so-sad*” song, the morbid “I Drink” a retread that first appeared on her sophomore set “**Drag Queens And Limousines,**” while the most promising cuts – subjectively - are the upbeat “Prayer Without Words” and the acoustic “Empty Spaces” [the latter doubtless drawn from the same *well of inspiration* as “Drop In A Bucket”]. As for songs where the gospel remains the same, try the album opener “Falling Out Of Love.” On “**Mercy Now**” Mary has been searching for new ground.....

Post 1995 only one songwriter reinvented *the wheel* Stateside and his name was Dave Carter.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 04/05