



Rod Picott & Amanda Shires **“Sew Your Heart With Wires”** Welding Rod Records

Rod Picott caught an Amanda Shires solo performance during a SXSW Music Conference showcase [in Austin], back in the Spring of 2006, and they formed a musical alliance soon afterwards. Amanda toured the U.K. that Fall as part of Rod’s road band. Two years on, the duo has released **“Sew Your Heart With Wires”** a collection of ten Picott/Shires musical collaborations. Recorded and engineered by Picott [and mixed by his long time collaborator David Henry at the latter’s True Tone Recording studio in Nashville], Miss Amanda shines on fiddle, baritone uke and thumb piano, Rod’s acoustic guitar deftly propels each melody, while the pair vocalise together and apart.

You may recall, from those long gone days of scholarly inattention, that mercury when heated expands, and when cooled contracts. Simple, huh? Not when it comes to ‘that thing called love’ – which runs hot at the outset then somehow cools, and the foregoing forms the lyrical premise of the gently melodic opening cut. After the Summer comes the Fall and then that bitter, bitter Winter, the latter being the seasonal backdrop for “Mercury.” At the close of the line *“The things you said, then took away”* Shires’ voice wavers thereby inferring some remembered [past] experience. Colourful characters Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Lee Lewis and Spade Cooley are referenced, albeit indirectly, in the third and fourth verses of “Drive That Devil Out,” a number which is launched by the poetic line *“Every crooked word from your heart of coal.”* Isn’t it curious that those opposites – heaven and hell – both begin with the letter ‘h,’ and the “Drive That Devil Out” lyric reflects on how ‘man’ determines his/her eventual destination via [the repeated chorus line] *“When you leave this world behind.”*

From the opening line uncertainty pervades “You Can’t Call Me Baby” as Shires informs the listener *“You can’t call me baby, you used that name on the girl before me, You’re searching my freckles for her skin.”* Where a female voice takes the lead on the latter – therein the narrator colourfully chides *“...if I’m a lily or a cactus doesn’t make much difference...”* - the ensuing “Shake And Cry” could be interpreted as her partner’s reply. Rod is joined by Amanda on the “Shake And Cry” chorus, and the narrator’s ‘a little late now’ conclusion amounts to *“I should have known your love was true.”* Translated from Spanish the word “Salida” means ‘exit.’ That said, it’s also the name of a couple of cities in the South west region of America, and is the setting for this bittersweet memory of love lost. The “Salida” lyric is blessed by memorable couplets such as *“No need to cry, a rusty barrel full of salty tears, Cuz they won’t dry”* and *“A mistake to tread the ground where, A memory hangs around.”* As if all this angst concerning ‘love lost’ wasn’t enough, “Salida” closes with the haunting sound-scape of a dog barking and a plane passing overhead, supported [musically] by a wild gypsy fiddle and plucked bass strings. Spade [Cooley] was incarcerated for killing his second wife, and darn if “Little Darlin’” isn’t that folk music staple, a murder ballad. And a pretty neat up-tempo number to boot.

The narrator in “Arrows On Your Compass” searches for love – sic. *“...a soul, Somewhat like your own.”* When I heard Amanda and Rod perform “Mean Little Girl [Ruby]” in concert recently, as the storyline unfolded visions of **“Bonnie & Clyde”** – the visually graphic 1960’s movie - came to mind. How does this tale of robbery and mayhem conclude? Go buy the album, seems like sound advice to me. The penultimate song is the gospel tinged “When You Get Your Story Told.” Subjectively the antithesis of the second cut “Drive That Devil Out,” the uplifting lyric verbalises simplicity and faith via verses such as *“I don’t want any mansion, I don’t wait on shiny pearls, Just the hand of my saviour, To lift me from this lonely world.”* “Bird And Pony,” an acoustic guitar and fiddle instrumental, flows like warm honey and gently lays this memorable [duo debut] set to rest.

The eye candy aspect of this ‘Yellow Rose’ apart, Amanda Shires more than proves via her vocals, instrument playing and input to these compositions that she’s a talented individual. Boy she can make

that fiddle bow fly, but is well aware of when a couple of plucked strings is enough. Rod Picott, meantime, has proved by way of a quartet of studio albums that he's one of the best 'blue collar' song-smiths to come out of the state of Maine. On this sonically 'bare to the bone' acoustic collaboration, Picott proves that he can also deliver when it comes to gentle and sensitive.

Folkwax Score 9 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

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