



Hardpan "**Hardpan**" Blue Rose Records

Hardpan is a, to date, one-off project album that features the songs and voices of American born singer/songwriters Terry Lee Hale, Todd Thibaud, Joseph Parsons and Chris Burroughs. The thirteen tracks on the album were recorded at The Studio in Tucson, Arizona from 11th through 22nd September 2001. The Studio doubles as Burroughs' home and, according to the liner, on 10th September a small celebration was held to launch the project. A matter of half a day later, the participants awoke to a *changed world*. Undaunted they launched into the task.

The participants are all guitar players and alternating between electric and acoustic models the only other embellishment on the tracks is the occasional use of bass, harmonica and percussion – mainly using shakers and brushes. As for *slicing up the pie*, each of the players contributed at least three original songs and the set closes with the appropriately titled, "Tucson Sky," the only number actually written during the recording sessions. The cut features a Thibaud lyric – "*written after a long night of tequila and orange juice. I woke up the next morning with the chorus in my head*" while the music is credited to Hardpan. As for Todd's words, they hinge *heavily* around "*there's something about tequila and a Tucson sky*" which is repeated nine times within the twenty-three lines of lyric. I guess it was one of those precious, *you had to be there*, yet, *hazy* holiday moments that he felt impelled to capture. While we're in the nether region of the disc following a short span of dead air, there's a sixty-second segment where, in preparation to cut a track you hear the musicians talking – about nothing much in particular. Which begs the inclusion question - why ?

Thibaud opens the collection with "To Bury An Angel," a paean to love lost. Whether Julia – "*where she is now is hard to say*" - has actually died, or merely moved on, is open to interpretation. Todd's song does, however, feature a couple of neat images in "*She slipped away like smoke beneath a door*" and "*I think I see her in an early bloom, I sometimes feel her in an empty room.*" Line by line, "Close To The Border," penned by Burroughs, is akin to observing a series of disparate frames from a movie. A road song of sorts, "*The boys in the front room were playing bored games*" is one of countless image filled frames. A sense of desperation links the aforementioned cuts and, underpinned by chunky electric guitar riffs, Hale maintains that feel with his tale of a woman who is a "Bad Luck Hand." Parsons, meanwhile, paints a picture of a self-interested character in "No Disguise." Elsewhere on the disc, the countless questions posed in Hale's darkly titled "Black Cloud" actually make for a positive upbeat number, while the Parsons/Burroughs collaboration, "Accidents," written during the summer of '01, is a finely observed ballad dedicated to the premise that "*they're meant to happen.*"

Folkwax Rating 6 out of 10

Arthur Wood
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