



Cheryl Wheeler **"Different Stripe"** Rounder/Philo Records

While the liner booklet features a *wooded snow covered winter scene* painted by a Cheryl, aged 10, musically **"Different Stripe"** amounts to a collection that reprises Wheeler's recording career to date. It all began in 1983 with the self-released EP **"Newport Songs,"** and has since witnessed half a dozen albums of original material for the North Star, Cypress, Capitol and Rounder/Philo labels plus one "in concert" video.

Quickly scanning the nineteen selections in this retrospective, the *anti-gun law* "If It Were Up To Me" is the song that is, sadly, *missing in action*. Considering the controversy that Wheeler's lyric whipped up when it appeared on her 1999 album **"Sylvia Hotel"** it is as much a Cheryl career high, as, say, Dan Seals scoring a US Country # 1 single, circa 1988, with her song "Addicted." Similarly, Suzy Bogguss took Cheryl's "Aces" into the Country singles Top Ten in 1992 and Wheeler's 1990 rendition of the title is featured here. Also missing from this compilation is a single cut from Wheeler's 1987 Cypress album **"Half A Book,"** a North Star reissue in 1991. What's more, her legendary *onstage* penchant for delivering wicked rib-aching humour, on compositions like "Potato," has similarly been by-passed on this disc. So those are the shortcomings, but here are the good points.

"Walk Around Downtown," set in Wheeler's beloved Rhode Island – "Yes, I see now, though I never did before, how these steeples in this sky line look so lovely" and "This summer night we are wandering through, Is perfect in this Providence July" – and the *was it because of some good deed that I found love again* song "Ghandi/Buddha," featuring a Marc Cohen support vocal, are the two previously unreleased cuts that contribute to making this collection being a genuine 24 carat *must have*.

Career long, Wheeler's forte has been hook-laden melodies wed to lyrics, more often than not, featuring couples falling *out* of, rather than *in*, love. Prime examples of the latter are "Miss You More Than I'm Mad" and *almost* "Almost"; while in the former league I'd recommend "One Love" and "Arrow."

It seems appropriate that the disc opens with "Northern Girl" – circa October 1985, Cheryl performed the song on the vinyl album that accompanied Issue 208 of Fast Folk Music Magazine, and the tune reappeared on her 1990 album **"Circles & Arrows."** Although raised in Maryland, Wheeler has now spent over half her as a New England resident, yet even two decades ago her outlook was that of a *northern girl*. "When Fall Comes To New England," a time of the *big red*, further pursues that theme.

"75 Septembers," written for her father, finds Cheryl looking back to her ancestral home in Maryland, as she recalls fondly his birth and the *simpler and [possibly] more satisfying* life of her "third kid grandmom." While "I can see the place where I came from" the opening line of "Further And Further" appears to imply excellent recall, Wheeler goes on to attest that, in truth, with passing time those precious recollections seem to be "*slipping further and further away.*" Vancouver B.C. is the setting for the wistful *road* song, "Sylvia Hotel," which intertwines the foregoing theme with reminiscences of a lover who has returned to Colorado.

In the world of *you can't have it all*, new albums by Wheeler are all too rare an occurrence. I just hope that Cheryl chooses to shine a light on some new self-penned gems sooner rather than later.....until then **"Different Stripe"** will more than suffice.

Folkwax Rating 9 out of 10

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