



Greg Copeland “**Diana And James**” Inside Recordings

Greg, Steve Noonan [more about him in a couple of weeks] and Jackson Browne [who was a couple of years younger] were buddies during the mid nineteen-sixties while attending Sunny Hills High School in Fullerton, California. In time they co-wrote and/or covered each other's songs, and just over a quarter of a century ago Jackson produced Greg's Geffen Records debut “**Revenge Will Come**.” I fondly remember how it surfaced like “white light” during a time when a singer/songwriter with a recording contracts was rarer than “*finding a cricket ball in the Sahara Desert*.” Jackson's band backed Greg on the sessions, and 26 years on, on a few “**Diana And James**” cuts, Bob Glaub [bass] plays a *return engagement*. This fourteen-song album is a tale of two Greg's [+], since Greg Leisz [Funky Kings, Dave Alvin] produced it. Introduced to each other by Jackson, a few years in the making, the album is released by Browne's Inside Recordings.

Copeland the younger's “**Revenge Will Come**” lyrics were full of “[punk] piss and vinegar.” For instance “El Salvador,” the penultimate cut, exposed the shenanigans of President Reagan and his backroom boys. Critically lauded the album failed to shift in proverbial skip loads [and I can tell you that it thoroughly **deserved** to], leaving Copeland to conclude that tilting at windmills was fine and dandy but feeding his wife and young sons was THE priority. For two decades he found employment, initially as a paralegal then a lawyer. Is that ironic? While you hope that ‘in spite of the hard knocks of the music business’ the prodigal might return - most don't. Casting aside the political commentary that underpinned the “El Salvador” quote “*Praise for the ones who are buried and gone, And the strong hearts who just disappear*,” “**Diana And James**” furnishes ample proof that Copeland the elder possesses a strong and resilient heart.

“**Diana And James**” gets down to business with “Muddy Water,” a shuffle beat propelled number that opens with “*There ought to be a law, Live and let live*.” A young woman, murdered, is pulled from the water and as the lyric unfold minor facts regarding what, ultimately, remains a mystery are revealed, “*She had a twenty-year watch, Around her wrist, Little lariat cowboys, On her dancing dress*.” The album title track follows, wherein we meet, probably at a bad time, the male and female protagonists. Straight from the hip, James delivers – “*There's nobody else I want to be, Nobody else I can turn into, Honey baby, where have you been*.” Leisz's lap steel injects a country flavour into the ensuing “The Only Wicked Thing,” wherein, *poetically*, the narrator recalls how alcohol numbs his pain - “*For the memories of her and you, The milk of the madhouse, Say thank you to the man in the roadhouse*.” In the waltz paced “I'll Find Someone,” still fuelled by the genie in the bottle – “*I've got my smoke and wine, And my Ballantines*” – the male protagonist, sanguine but informed by experience, journeys on alone. “*Take a little look down Lovers' Lane, Heaven help us all, It's titty bars and attitude stars*,” reinforces his comprehension of the way life is, and Leisz's use in a mid-song instrumental break of [an un-credited] hammered dulcimer [*] and Gabe Witcher's violin, simply endorses the narrator's melancholic mindset.

That mind remains chock-full of confusion and uncertainty in “Between Two Worlds,” while a moment of clarity ensues in the murder confession “I Am The One.” Immediately following the petition “*Precious Lord, be my witness*,” it's hard to discern whether regret pervades the line “*Do I love her, oh my goodness*,” and Copeland subtly squares the circle, with the closing verse reference to a dress - “*the one with the cowboys*.” The Biblical, nay crusading “Count The Bodies On My Crown” is followed by a traveller tale “Blue Room, Red Suitcase,” which includes the entreaty “*And don't fake nothing, Until you're gone*.” Given that we only have three score and ten on this plane, an insufficient period in which, given the will, we can learn everything, in “Who You Gonna Love” the narrator adds “*Maybe we could*

find about 100,000 more years, And we could start to figure this out." On the latter, a wistful sonic backdrop is created by Leisz's acoustic guitar and Phil Parlapiano's organ/piano.

When it comes to pedal steel guitar Leisz is practitioner *par excellence* and on "Typical" it injects a smoky bar-room country feel into the album's shortest cut. The focus of this collection is, subjectively, "A Woman & A Man" and the opening insight *"There it is again, L.A.'s buzzing like a busted amp"* establishes the location, while the ensuing *"And I think of you, Yes, I'm on the mend"* and *"I've been dreaming and now I'm coming too"* hint at recovery. However, other issues are addressed therein. Having decided to once again meld word and melody, I wonder if the presence of *"Pick up that Gibson and play, Go fall in love and don't stop"* hint at this being Copeland the elder's first composition, while there's a nod to past social commentary in *"And the politicians, Are pissing in the wishing well."* Heather Waters' harmony vocal on this cut fits like a glove, Carrie to Greg's Chip [Taylor]. On "Palace of Love" Greg shares the lead vocal with violinist Carla Kihlstedt [Tin Hat etc.]. The edgy words Copeland furnishes, simply enhance Carla's already sensual sounding delivery. "All Those Things," a delightful and lilting waltz, brings **"Diana And James"** to a close with the narrator concluding he has *"...seen enough, Of this long gaudy fall, Out of love."*

Copeland's **"Diana And James"** is a diamond, proof positive that while his singing voice discloses wear, his skill with lyric and tune remain intact. Revenge can be timely and sweet.

Note.

[+] – Greg Ladanyi shared the sound engineering role with Dennis Kirk on **"Revenge Will Come."**

[*] – Or an instrument that replicates the sound.

Folkwax Score 9 out of 10.

Arthur Wood.

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