



Tom Pacheco **"There Was A Time"** Appleseed Recordings

It has been six semi-barren years since we were treated to a Tom Pacheco solo album featuring all new material. It's true that toward the end of a ten-year long, self-imposed exile in Ireland that Tom cut the 2CD **"Bare Bones & Barbed Wire."** About a year later, in July 1998, having settled in Woodstock he cut another 2CD collection, **"The Lost American Songwriter,"** but both projects contained material Pacheco had included on previous solo albums. Of course, in Y2K, we also enjoyed Tom's duo album **"Nobodies"** with Steinar Albrigtsen.

"There Was A Time," produced by long time Anne Hills associate, Scott Petito, and recorded in his Catskill, New York studio features ten new Pacheco songs and one co-write. In the liner note Tom sets out his lifelong personal philosophy with *"I have never liked nostalgia. It depresses me."* Continuing in that vein for a few sentences, he then delivers his ethos for this album, *"This year was different..."* During that year numerous close friends passed on, as did one loving parent, while Tom observed another deteriorate physically. In dealing with genuine *day to day* crisis, artists consistently produce works of consummate beauty. Born of pain, personal and universal, **"There Was A Time"** is a most blessed creation.

Ecology and preservation of the earth's resources have been sacred to Pacheco from the outset. His 1976 RCA album, **"Swallowed Up In The Great American Heartland,"** included "The Tree Song," and on this disc "Butterfly" reflects Tom unwavering world view with a lyric that celebrates Julia "Butterfly" Hill's two-year long battle with commercial loggers in Northern California's redwood forests. Mining the same vein, the gentle [and at times, almost hypnotic] "Indian Prayer (The Land I Love)," co-written a number of years ago [#] with Native American activist and performer Roland Moussaa, opens this collection. Supported by Moussaa's background chant and the banjo of Pete Seeger, the song is a prayer that requests that we allow *the land* to regenerate itself naturally. Assuming an equally spiritual mantle in "If I Could Come Back," when his days on earth are done Pacheco prays for reincarnation as a *"summer night."* Using the image of a "Broken Piano" as a metaphor for a relationship that has, over time, failed, Tom's lyric paints the portrait of a grand piano that has stood deteriorating for some forty years in the heart of the desert. According to Tom this monument was left there by its owner, after he wrote a song that the whole world knows which was dedicated *"to the woman he loved."* [Sadly the love the writer offered was not reciprocated].

Corporate pension fund impropriety – *"They still ride in limos, we wait for the bus"* and *"Out in the Cayman Islands or in Switzerland somewhere, There's seven billion dollars for the boys in suits to share"* - comes under Tom's accurate, laser cut focus in "What About Us." The album title track looks back to a simpler *"not long in the past"* time when *"rivers ran clear, The birds and the wind were all you could hear, The air was so sweet in the morning sunshine."* Overtaken by the relentless, commercially driven need for *all things new* we now live in an age where Joe Public worships at the altar of personality, while retention of a job [and for that matter, a career] depends upon the colour of the *bottom line*. To the foregoing you can add the fact that school playgrounds are no longer gun-free places of safety, and raising a family and sustaining a marriage is no longer a lifelong commitment. As Tom concludes, we now live in *"the big sleep, well planned and designed. Turned lions to sheep, there was a time."*

Set in the Cape Cod, Massachusetts peninsula town of "Provincetown" Tom's lyric reflects upon a tender love affair from times past, where one of the participants, the woman, has passed on – *"We think life never ends, it goes on and on like an endless shore."* The intensity with which the narrator loved and lost is memorialised in the [repeated] chorus line, *"I can't bear the thought of rain falling on your grave."* In that regard, the song captures, perfectly, the old Shakespearean maxim – *it is better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all* – while the narrator's memory of the *love of his life*, after all these years, still

burns brightly like a freshly lit candle. "What We Left Behind," on the other hand, is a happy go lucky hoe-down that also hankers after an age when community meant helping each other along life's path, *with no strings attached*. Tom began writing "Heroes" in early Y2K but only completed the first three verses, respectively concerning heroic acts by firemen, astronauts and soldiers taking part in the D-Day landings. The final verse celebrates the *heroes* on Flight 93.

The narrator of "Saint Christopher And The Cornfield" recalls the boyhood quartet "*Jeffrey and Curtis and Joey and me*," while revisiting the cornfield where they once enjoyed, innocent, daily adventures forty years back. Jeffrey died in Quang Tri while serving in the US Army in Vietnam. Joey's life ended one freezing night, the occupant of cardboard box on a Baltimore bridge. Curtis became a hit-and-run victim – "*The rednecks who hit him did not shed a tear*" - while riding his Harley through New Mexico. The upbeat anthem "You Will Never Be Afraid Again," which closes the album, urges the listener to dig deep and find some inner strength with which to fight the good fight, whether "*on a faraway shore*" or "*at your back door*."

Truthfully, once, there really was a time. By way of eleven vignettes this disc tellingly captures snapshots of those times. Oh what a time it truly wasand oh what a truly superb job Pacheco has done.

Note.

[#] Richie Havens included it on his 1974 album "**Mixed Bag II.**"

Folkwax Rating 9 out of 10

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 09/02 & 10/02