



Bruce Robison **“Eleven Stories”** Sustain Records [album release now 4th April]

Discounting the captured at Gruene Hall Y2K recording **“Unleashed Live,”** which also featured contributions from his older brother Charlie and Jack Ingram, **“Eleven Stories”** is Bruce Robison's fifth solo release. It's one of the first recordings to be released by the fledgling Texas Hill Country based label, Sustain Records. The label is based in Kerrville – the town that's been “almost home” to the annual folk festival for three and a half decades – while, if you drove about twenty miles due south, on Highway 173, you'd come to Bandera, the town where Bruce grew up. These days Bandera is the self-appointed “Cowboy Capital of the World.”

Robison's previous solo effort **“Country Sunshine”** [2001] was composed entirely of originals and co-writes, while his earlier albums usually embraced a few well-chosen covers, and the latter is pretty much the approach taken on **“Eleven Stories.”** It appears that Robison recorded a demo of “Every Once In A While” towards the end of the sessions for this release, with the intention of using it on a future recording. He was so pleased with the end result that it became the opening track on **“Eleven Stories.”** A gently loping number, in terms of melody, in the lyric the narrator recalls an old flame. He even goes as far as trying to contact her, but she has moved on, and with a degree of regret he draws the conclusion, *“The feelings remain, after all this time.”* It comes to light as “Virginia” evolves that the principal character has made some future life decisions that don't include her current amour. “Tennessee Jed” is the first of three covers on this disc. This goodtime sounding Robert Hunter/Jerry Garcia composition dates from the Grateful Dead's 3lp concert recording **“Europe '72,”** and on this reading Bruce is supported by funky sounding heavenly [female] chorus. It's followed by “More And More,” thematically, a *“I guess we're falling out of love”* Webb Pierce composition dating from 1954. Later that year, the song scored its composer a ten-week stint at # 1 on the Country Singles Chart. Almost three decades later, Charlie Price took it to # 7 on the same chart, and on **“Eleven Stories”** Bruce shares the vocal with his wife Kelly Willis. Replete with pedal steel, fiddle and piano, it's best summed up as a sad duet in the George and Tammy mould.

The lyric to “Days Go By” features the recollections of a present day homeless person – back in '74 he was wed but the marriage fell apart after they lost a child at birth, and of course they also had his drug habit to deal with plus the small matter of *“this little problem with my mind.”* Bruce's vocal is underpinned by an acoustic guitar, plus a swirling, yet distant, figure played on an organ. Overall, there's a distinctly melancholic feel to the cut. “Days Go By” sounds like a song that might have turned up on a latter day Beatles album. At the other end of the scale, the heavily orchestrated “All Over But The Cryin'” captures the pain felt by one party, and sometimes both [parties], following the end of an affair of the heart. The track also features a Kelly Willis backing vocal. Moving on, “Don't Call It Love” surveys the ups and downs of relationships [with the opposite sex] from a woman's point of view. Rhythmically rowdy at the outset and also on the chorus, “You Really Let Yourself Go” intentionally grabs the listener by the scruff of the neck and for the ensuing two minutes forty-five seconds takes him/her on a hook laden roller coaster ride.

Stripped down to a voice and acoustic guitar presentation initially, a restrained B3 organ, strings and percussion subsequently join the fray, as the narrator reflects on his life in “I Never Fly.” The penultimate track “Kitchen Blues,” is another reflective number. If not melodically then without a doubt subjectively it comes from the same mould as the Lovin' Spoonful's “Rain On The Roof.” The closing cut, “Bandera Waltz,” penned by Easy Adams, was made famous during his tenure with the western swing band,

Texas Top Hands. Founded in 1946 and about to enter their seventh decade playing music, Adams owned and led the band during the period 1955-1979. The song was subsequently covered by a number of country musicians including Slim Whitman, Ernest Tubb, Rex Allen, Jimmy Wakely and David Houston. And having mentioned Bandera, we end pretty much where we began.

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 02/06.