



Pierce Pettis **"State Of Grace"** Compass Records

When Mark Heard succumbed to a heart attack in 1992, Pierce resolved to include one of Heard's compositions on each of his ensuing solo albums. The opening cut here, "Rise From The Ruins" - a gospel styled paean to mastering the act and art of survival, taken from Mark's 1990 Fingerprint album **"Dry Bone Dance"** makes four opening tracks in a row, as far as *that promise* is concerned. The only other cover here is the penultimate cut, Dylan's "Down In The Flood." Originally released on the 1971 **"Greatest Hits Volume II"** collection, I guess it's a fans way of celebrating the Bobster's sixtieth year. The remaining material, eleven songs, add up to one of the strongest Pettis sets, to date, all of it self-penned, some with other scribes. A son of Alabama by birth, and a deeply religious man, the title track is a thematic wordplay - expressed in terms of simple acts of faith, while focusing on the geography of *the heart of Dixie*. Memories of youthful summers in the South are recalled with humour and pathos in "Little River Canyon." Days when *"girls would lie on terry cloth and bake,"* as the male gender looked on *"with heads more full of hormones than brains"*; and when the genders finally got together - frankly, it become a *"tangle of tongues and teeth and hair."* Moontown, co-penned with Claire Lynch, is the tale of a "dry" - *"no Budweiser, No Black Label,"* quiet and peaceful backwater. As the opening verse relates *"heaven is a place that everybody here believes in, We have every reason - in Moontown."* Elsewhere the tender "Georgia Moon" recalls the innocence of teenage love, while "Long Way Back Home" an unconventional road song was co-written with Gordon Kennedy, who produced Pierce's 1998 Compass Records album **"Everything Matters."** Produced by bassist Garry West, his wife, Alison Brown picks her banjo, Nashville expatriate Clive Gregson plays guitar and Hammond B3 while Gordon Kennedy, Claire Lynch, Tim O'Brien and Jonell Mosser add their voices to the final mix. Chock full of insightful and thoughtful lyrics, **"State Of Grace"** gives witness to a man at the peak of his power.

Folkwax rating - 8 out of 10

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