



Kate Campbell **"Blues And Lamentations"** Large River Music

Following a five-year period in which Kate Campbell released a gospel song collection, a tribute album featuring country music hits from decades gone by, and more recently a pair of recordings that reassessed her back catalogue, **"Blues And Lamentations"** is a collection of mostly new material. The word "blue," or variations thereof, appears in the titles of five of the thirteen tracks, and reappears in the lyric of even more of them. The album was produced by Walt Aldridge and he co-wrote six of the songs with Kate. The album also features three cover songs. So what is/are the blues? - in colour terms there are many shades and hues, and the same could be said for how we sometimes feel personally, while "the blues" can also be an enriching aural experience.

The easy listening opening cut "Miles Of Blues," penned by Kate and Walt, comes across as a travelogue that covers the boundaries of America's forty-eight mainland states [+] – *"The delta ain't the only place you might find sorrow on some face,"* and the lyric also works as an all-embracing prologue for this themed collection. According to Campbell's liner notes, Guy Clark played the traditional "Pans Of Biscuits" for Kate about a decade ago, and since then she has been waiting for the opportunity to record the song. Well that opportunity just arrived, and on the track Clark shares the vocal with Kate. As you might suspect "Genesis Blues," a Kate/Mark Narmore collaboration, features lyrical mention of a number of Biblical characters and locations, and proceeds to tie them to America's Southern States, birthplace of a certain colourful genre of music.

"Freedom Train" penned by Kate and Kevin Gordon opens with Moses on his way to the Promised Land, and later mentions Miss Tubman – Harriet Ross Tubman - the former slave who led hundreds of African Americans north to freedom on the Underground Railroad, and was later a Union spy during the Civil War. The link between these disparate events being the expression of a task unfulfilled in the lyric - *"I may not get there with you."* Another Kate/Walt collaboration, "New Blues" sets off at a walking pace, later some New Orleans sounding horns offer a sad refrain, while a sixties sounding, soulful choir croons in the background. The principle character in "Pans Of Biscuits" is a farmer, and the plucked banjo which underpinned that cut also establishes the rhythm from the outset of "Free World." In the lyric, Kate's narrator attests that he/she is *"Going out into the free world and farm."* In succeeding verses the, clearly, industrious narrator also claims that he/she is going to *"buy me a mule," "have me some chickens"* and *"spin me some very fine yarns."* I figure there's an unintentional element of double entendre in the latter contention.

The real life story of Burrell Cannon is recalled in "Wheels Within Wheels." Cannon was a Baptist minister in the East Texas town of Pittsburg, and circa 1902, he persuaded investors to fund the building of a vertical take-off airship. Supposedly the airship flew a short distance, one year before the Wright Bros. epic flight at Kittyhawk in December 1903. The song recalls how the Ezekiel Airship, which was being transported by train, on a flatbed car, to the World's Fair in St. Louis, fell off near Texarkana, Texas and was destroyed. Although history records that Cannon built a second airship he eventually abandoned the project. This Kate and Walt co-write explains that Cannon's idea for the airship came from interpreting the Book of Ezekiel, Ch.1 V.16.

In "Shallow Grave" Kate and Walt employ the image of a burial place, as the location to which a *"calloused and heartless"* husband has consigned his love for his wife. In reply the wife offers, *"Somehow you'll meet the same dark fate, Someone will take the love you gave, And put it in a shallow*

grave in the ground.” It’s back to the sound of brass on “Mining Camp Blues” a coalmining themed number, credited here to Trixie Smith/P.D. Smith was an Atlanta, Georgia born blues singer who enjoyed success in New York vaudeville and theatre productions during the opening decades of the twentieth century. “Fade To Blue,” penned by Kate/Walt, is a pleasant enough ballad concerning a long-ago love that the main character lost – except that, ritually obsessed, he cannot forget. In Kate’s “Lay Back In The Darkness” the weary narrator expresses a wish to “*Lay down these blues for good.*” Performed *a cappella* and employing a tambourine set the tempo, “Lord, Help The Poor And Needy,” is, based on its title, a self-explanatory prayer. This gospel tinged number was penned by Jessie Mae Hemphill, the Mississippi bred country blues singer, whose performing career was cut short in the mid nineteen-nineties when she suffered a debilitating stroke that confined her to a wheelchair. The closing cut and sixth Kate/Walt co-write, “Peace Comes Stealing Slow,” is a ballad that features support vocals from Maura O’Connell, and in painting portraits of a battlefront soldier alone and scared in a frontline trench and a homeless woman, of unsound mind, standing shivering on the street, subjectively it fittingly bookends the foregoing “Lord, Help The Poor And Needy.”

The fold-out poster style liner includes all the song lyrics, set out in a circular pattern, and also features *Palaeozoic* styled artwork by Brooklyn based Michelle Mackey – is that the skull of some long extinct dinosaur captured in an ancient cave painting? – and a trio of quotes which each include the word “*blue*” by - the famous and not so famous, yet totally - worthy American artists/authors, Georgia O’Keeffe, Zora Neale Hurston and Annie Dillard. There’s a fourth “*blue*” quote on the rear tray of the CD case by Remy Davis. Impeccable musicianship is present throughout this collection, but then you’d expect nothing less from a disc recorded in Nashville. As for Kate’s new songs, despite repeated listening, I failed to experience that goose-bump rush of excitement regarding this collection, that I recall experiencing with, say, “**Rosaryville**” and “**Visions Of Plenty.**” Maybe that effect will come in time.....that apart, there’s no doubting the continued literacy of Campbell’s newest compositions.

Note.

[+] – The ones below the 49th parallel, that is.

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 08/05.