



Bill Staines “Old Dogs” Red House Records

Like its three year old predecessor “**Journey Home**,” “**Old Dogs**” was recorded at Larry Luddecke’s Straight Up Studio in Arlington, Mass. Ably supported by many of the ‘usual suspects’ – Brian Wood [guitar], Mike Walsh [bass], Bill Novick [whistle, sax, clarinet], John Curtis [mandolin, dobro, banjo], Guy Van Duser [guitar] and not least, Luddecke [keyboards] - Staines has come up with a thirteen-song collection of original and cover songs to which he has appended another ‘*mature in years*’ title. Co-produced by Larry and Bill, Staines opens with the [self-penned] “Old Dogs” a reflection on the memories that the passage of years – nay decades - brings, and continuing to reflect on old age – and what awaits us after we spin off this ‘mortal coil’ – with a reading of Joseph Spence’s “Great Dream From Heaven” the first of seven cover songs. For a just turned sixty New Englander, Bill’s “Sweet Wyoming Home” is a melodically mellifluous lyrical fiction, and additionally the touching tale of a weary, down on his luck, travelling bull rider.

The proud narrator in Norman Blake’s “Uncle Sam,” it appeared on Blake’s 1978 Takoma release “**Directions**,” is the nephew/niece of this former cocaine addicted cornet player. In the opening verse of the wonderful word portrait “Savannah,” Bill’s lyric name checks Johnny Mercer’s hit composition “Moon River” and later references Sherman’s 1864 ‘Christmas present’ to Abe Lincoln. In his liner notes, Staines explains that the two-song, “Cotten Pickin’,” is a tribute to the late Elizabeth Cotten [d. 1987] the traditional blues/folk musician and left-handed guitarist. The cut solely features Staines’ voice and guitar, and is compsed of the segue of “Freight Train” penned by Cotten, Paul James and Frederick Williams followed by Cotton’s own “Oh Babe It Ain’t No Lie.” No one observes or paints portraits of the American landscape quite like Bill and “Once We Walked” is another fine addition to his already extensive catalogue.

Pre their sojourn with vocalist Jimmy Gilmer, George Tomsco was a founding member of the Raton, New Mexico based instrumental band The Fireballs. The lyrically optimistic “That’s My Song” was penned by George and his wife Barbara Elliott. The Fireballs worked as the house band at Norman Petty’s Clovis studio, and Tomsco played on recordings by artists as diverse as Arthur Alexander and Austin, Texas bred folkie Carolyn Hester. Tomsco accompanied Hester on her legendary 1965 [New York] Town Hall concert [and subsequently released 1990 CD recording], a performance that included “That’s My Song.” Penned by former Kingston Trio alumni [2nd incarnation] John Stewart “Cody” first appeared in his 1968 duo recording “**Signals Through The Glass**” with his wife Buffy Ford, and was reinterpreted on a number of subsequent solo releases by Big John.

A tale of bittersweet unrequited love “Lone Star Hotel Café” is quite simply a Guy Clark classic and first appeared on his Rodney Crowell produced album “**The South Coast Of Texas**” [1981]. Larry Murray the writer of the waltz paced “Mama Lou” was the leader of Hearts & Flowers a late 1960’s trio that at various times featured Bernie Leadon [Flying Burrito Bros., Eagles] and Rick Cunha [Hot Band]. Previously covered by Mary McCaslin and Jim Ringer [their “**The Bramble And The Rose**” is one of the all-time classic duo albums] and Rita Coolidge, here Bill reprises this tale of “*an old gold toothed lady with a big bamboo fan*” who played piano and sang. The penultimate song, “The Heavens And The Years,” once again finds Staines in a ‘time based’ reflective mood. A wistful instrumental featuring acoustic guitar, violin and whistle, “Andie’s Air” closes yet another laid-back and entertaining Staines song collection.

Arthur Wood.
Kerrville Kronikles 11/07.