

LACY J. DALTON: BAD TIMES GOOD TIMES

A lot of garbage has been written since the mid seventies, when the country 'outlaw movement became trendy. Does it really matter what style an artist embraces, as long as the listener finds something in the music that brings enjoyment, understanding and satisfaction?

A case in point is, that fairly new recruit to the recording scene, Jill Byrem. 'Jill who?8, you may ask and to be honest, I'd have to come clean, because the lady in question now trades under the name of Lacy J. Dalton. The J stands for Jill obviously, while Dalton gives that 'outlaw' image and was stolen from Karen Dalton- supposedly a descendant of these outlaws from the old west- a singer who Jill met in Northern California. Lacy rounds off her stage name and gives it a mellow touch.

Lacy was born in 1947 in the town of Bloomsburg in northeastern Pennsylvania. Her father was a hunting guide and her mother was a beautician by day and waitress by night. Her family had a great liking for country music, particularly western swing; her father played banjo, mandolin and guitar while her mother always sang. In those early years, Lacy just sat and listened.

After she left High school she started an art course at the mormon Brigham Young University in Salt Lake City, but her lack of finances and love of music forced her to drop out and she moved to Minnesota where she tried her hand at folk singing, including in her act, child ballads and protest songs. I think that at this stage, Lacy was also reneging against the strictures of the Mormon religion and wanted to taste unfettered freedom. Lacy is only five feet and one inch tall but at this stage in her life she developed to massive proportions, clocking almost 14 stone at one stage. The 'Mamma Cass' figure of old is now, however gone.

Because Lacy had no success in Minnesota, she returned home, briefly, then tried her luck in New York's Greenwich Village before finally moving to California in the late Sixties as lead vocalist with the acid rock band, Office. Throughout her time with the band, she received many offers of recording contracts, but only if she went solo. She remained committed to the band.

Although the band finally broke up Lacy married the band's manager, John Crosston, a Vietnam war veteran, In 1971, Crosston was totally paralyzed when his neck was broken in a swimming pool accident after he collided with another swimmer. Crosston eventually died in 1974, but a week after the accident happened, Lacy discovered that she was pregnant. When her son Adam was born, she moved, with her ailing husband to a cabin in the Santa Cruz mountains, where they lived very frugally on food stamps and her husband's G.I. benefits.

At this stage she started writing songs and also sang in the local night spots. Lacy met Karen Dalton while living in Northern California and she taught Lacy to play the guitar. Because she was a widow, bringing up a young son, Lacy had to take whatever jobs she could and worked variously as a cook, waitress and char woman.

By 1978 she was beginning to pick up a lot of dates in the Santa Cruz area, and on the strength of her local popularity she cut an album of her original songs, titled 'Jill Crosston'. The album ...

sold well at her concerts, and she also sent a large number of copies to various record companies and friends. One of those friends, lawyer David E. Wood, had wanted to diversify into the music field, and was at the time, searching for someone to manage. On the strength of Lacy's album, even though it was a fairly rough production, Wood took her to Los Angeles to cut some new demos and then, he convinced CBS that she was an act they should sign.

The rest like they say, is history. CBS signed Lacy and she was taken under the wing of an ace producer, Billy Sherrill, responsible for discovering other female talents such as Tammy Wynette and Tanya Tucker.

Even before she had her first chart entry, Lacy was featured in a full page article in Time magazine: an unprecedented piece of publicity for a new artist.

Lacy made her first country chart entry in late 1979 with 'Crazy Blue Eyes' which made the top 20 and followed it up with 'Tennessee Waltz' in early 1980.

Her first album recorded in Nashville and simply titled 'Lacy J. Dalton' was released in the States in the spring of last year, and featured her first two chart entries together with 'Losing kind of love' which made the country top 20 in mid summer last year. The album was an American Country Top 20 regular for most of last year, but still hasn't been released in Britain. Lacy won the 1980 Best New Female Vocalist category presented by the Academy of Country Music which topped what had been a phenomenally successful year for her.

The title track of Lacy's second album 'Hard Times' reached the Country top 10 in November last year, while the album was in the top 20 by the close of the year. The singles, 'Hillbilly girl with the blues' and 'Whisper', also taken from the second album both made the top 10 in the first half of 1981. 'Hard Times' was eventually released in Britain in the spring of this year.

To be honest, I thought that Lacy's first album was an excellent debut, which included eight songs that she had assisted in writing. She proved that she could pen quality material, ('Crazy Blue Eyes and Losing kind of love'), while her voice could handle a ballad and also belt it with the best of them when the need arose. The second album didn't have the same impact as the first, as far as I am concerned. For a start, I thought that it appeared too quickly after the first album and seemed very much a 'rush job', to capitalise on Lacy's ascending career.

Not satisfied with producing two albums in 1980, Lacy has now released her third album in eighteen months. Titled 'Takin' it easy' it was released in the States in July and should be out in this country fairly soon. Lacy has shot my argument about her rapid rate of releases to ribbons, as her third album is her best yet and is going to make her a big star. Produced as before by Billy Sherrill, at CBS Recording Studios in Nashville, the first side consists of ballads while the other contains harder rock style numbers.

The album title track is already a country top 30 single in the States with every prospect of going a lot higher and the album contains a fair number of other potential hit singles.

Still based in California, Lacy hasn't been attracted by the glitter of Nashville other than for recording purposes. On the road she is backed by her own band, the Dalton Gang, and she has toured the States regularly over the past eighteen months, with artists such as Bobby Bare.

Lacy is featured on the soundtrack album of the film 'Take this job and shove it', which has been based on Johnny Paycheck's 1978 No. 1 smash hit of the same name, penned by David Allen Coe.

And what of the future? Well, Lacy has still to perform publically in Britain, but I'm convinced we'll see her on these shores in the next twelve months. I wouldn't be surprised if Lacy releases some duet recordings in the near future; the above mentioned Mr. Bare currently shares the same image that has been created around Lacy, and they certainly have the potential to produce something quite magical.

Written by,
JO PAUL.