



Herb Pedersen “**Southwest**” Acadia/Evangeline Records

A quarter of a century ago [and then some], this album marked the launch of Pedersen’s solo recording career, although Herb never actively pursued *fame and fortune* by touring in support of his releases [*]. A pair of solo albums followed “**Southwest**,” the last nearly two decades ago, and in the last twenty-five years, as a member of numerous duos and bands, Herb has played on around twenty albums. That’s a significant pace for any musician....

The title “**Southwest**” conjures up a particular musical sound - that pedal steel driven genre that emanated from the Arizona/Colorado/New Mexico region during the height of the seventies country-rock explosion. And that’s a little strange, since Pedersen is a Californian who, residentially, has only strayed from the state of his birth when touring in bands etc. Originally issued by CBS/Epic, the sessions took place in Hollywood at Western Studios and were overseen by Mike Post. The original album liner was extremely thin of session detail, and Acadia had little choice but follow that template [#]. What is certain is that Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris contribute vocally to the finished product, while the L.A. based *session mafia* include Jim Gordon [drums], Lee Sklar [bass], John Guerin [drums], Al Perkins [pedal steel] and David Lindley [lap steel, fiddle].

Herb opens with a rendition of the Lennon/McCartney composition “Paperback Writer,” an urgent plea for the opportunity to place one’s foot on the first rung of fame, and it’s underscored by fiddles, pedal steel and *smooth as velvet* sounding guitars. The only other cover song, the penultimate cut, is Bill Monroe’s “Can’t You Hear Me Callin’” on which Herb well and truly pins his bluegrass colours to the mast. The major part of Herb’s career has been spent performing in bluegrass bands. When called upon [to do so], Herb can also deliver those down-home *swampy* country licks and “Rock & Roll Cajun,” the second cut, is his contribution to the genre. Going by the seemingly *familiar sound* of the high-flying slide guitar on this cut, I’d suggest that Lindley was plucking the strings.

Vocally there’s a smooth countrified feel to much of “**Southwest**” and “If I Can Sing A Song” co-written with Nikki Pedersen is a fine example. The latter track, essentially a love song, features strings. As does “Our Baby’s Gone,” an admission that at three years old, Pedersen’s daughter is fast growing up. Herb somewhat prematurely sings, “*the boys are going to chase her, I’ll be standing in line.*” Vocally, Emmylou Harris joins Herb on the cut. Pedersen was a member of The Dillards through the late Sixties and “The Hey Boys” first appeared on their album “**Wheatstraw Suite**.” One of Herb’s three co-composers on the latter cut, Roy Dean Webb, contributed to the sessions for this album. The lyric of “Jesus Once Again” opens with “*Happy home in heaven, The light of glory land, Jesus come and hold me, Help me make a stand,*” as the narrator relates that he has been “*visited by Satan.*” The narrator goes on to attest that, given assistance from above, he’ll live a good and honest life from here on in. With strings arranged by Mike Post, the ballad “Younger Days” is a pleasantly understated paean to the loss of innocence that forms part of the growing up process, while the string and steel filled closing track, “Wait A Minute,” is a song about love that is now lost.

I guess you could describe the contents of this disc as melodious and mellow pop-country. Pedersen's voice is smooth and graceful throughout this set. One thing is certain, when you're looking at shelving chock full of 12" vinyl discs, "**Southwest**" is one that I'd pick out as having stood the test of time. Ageless and magical, it's good to see it available on CD at last. What price a release for the follow-up, "**Sandman**"?

Note.

[*] – In the latter half of the seventies Pedersen worked almost continuously with the late John Denver.

[#] – The song lyrics and more fully annotated track by track details of the musicians are given on Herb's web site at <http://www.herbpedersen.com/>

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood
Kerrville Kronikles 02/03