



## Mary McCaslin **"A Life And Time"** Rounder/Philo Records

The realisation that this recording is almost a quarter of a century old is somewhat hard to comprehend. Once upon a time, McCaslin's *epistles* were a bi-annual event to look forward to, savour and spend time with. How time flies.....and all that! *To date*, McCaslin has released eight solo [and one duo] recording[s]. Circa 1981, **"A Life And Time"** was a Flying Fish release, and as history has proved [so far], in studio session terms, it was her penultimate solo recording. Rounder Records purchased that catalogue about a decade ago, a propitious fit considering their ownership of McCaslin's handful of Philo albums.

Throughout her recording career, in terms of content, McCaslin's albums have consistently been a marriage of covers and her own compositions. Produced by her, then, booking agent Mitch Greenhill [\*], it featured a coterie of top Los Angeles session players including, Jim Fielder [bass] and Al Perkins [pedal steel], **"A Life And Time"** conforms to the foregoing song pattern. Three McCaslin songs are featured, and "Northfield" which opens the album originally appeared on her **"Way Out West"** [1973]. Thematically, it is a song about seeking freedom, and in the chorus the narrator references that aim with *"Eighteen miles to Northfield, One more town along the line, I wish I knew how far to go to leave the pain behind."* The album title cut, a ballad, recalls a man, now passed, who, through the way he conducted his life, set an example to his offspring [and acquaintances]. The plaintive "Santana Song," the closing cut, finds the narrator recall at the outset *"ninety days of drought"* following which the lyric focuses upon the arrival of the Santana wind - in California it's an almost annual source of searing heat waves...and firestorms.

Back in 1966 the Holland/Dozier/Holland composition "You Keep Me Hangin' On" gave Motown's Supremes a pop/soul # 1 chart single, and two years later Iron Butterfly's heavier sounding reading reached # 6 on the same chart. Here McCaslin reprises this song about a love affair that is foundering on the rocks of indifference - the chorus attests *"Get out of my life, why don't you say it?"* Mary first cut the song for her *long out-of-print* 1969 album **"Goodnight Everybody."** Subjectively, the situation that prevails in Lehman, Lebowsky and Clarke's "Tender Love And Care" is the antithesis of the situation presented in the foregoing song. Completing a [consecutive] trio of love songs is the traditional, bluegrass sounding "Fair And Tender Ladies," a cautionary tale concerning faithfulness in affairs of the heart. On the original vinyl version of **"A Life And Time,"** Side 1 closed with a song by Mary's first husband, the late Jim Ringer. Ringer's only current, in catalogue, recording – a compilation – is titled **"The Band Of Jesse James."** The song of the same name relates the story of a roguish, unfaithful character whose behaviour marked him out, like Jesse James, as an *"outlaw on the run."*

The B-Side of the Capitol Records single that marked the launch of McCaslin's recording career featured one of Mike Nesmith's lesser-known tunes, "This All Happened Once Before." On this collection Mary casts her eye over one of the former Monkees' better-known numbers, "Some Of Shelley's Blues." Nesmith included his song about faith and love on **"Pretty Much Your Standard Ranch Stash"** [1973] [+]. Mary's banjo playing on this cut is best described as strident, and according to the liner the arrangement is based upon one the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band used when they cut the song for their 1970 album **"Uncle Charlie & His Dog Teddy"** Once upon a time – well back in the late sixties at least, folk songwriter Paul Siebel was a *contender* who cut a couple of fine albums for the then independent Elektra label. His western flavoured horse song, "Pinto Pony," first appeared on **"Jack-Knife Gypsy"** [1971]. In her youngster years, McCaslin was a major fan of television westerns. M. Rust's "Farewell Lone Ranger" recalls the occasion in 1979, over two decades after the tv series was cancelled [1949 - 1957], when the

actor [Clayton Moore] who played The Lone Ranger [for the longest period] was taken to court by the producers of a *new* Lone Ranger movie, to prevent him making further public appearances in full Ranger regalia. The court's decision was overturned in Moore's favour in 1985. The thought occurred [to me] that the lines "*He caught the bad guys and saved the women, Was a friend to the settler and the Indian*" hold a message for today's politicians, in terms of approaching many of our *vast, modern day divides*.

**Note.**

[\*] – Mitch Greenhill is the son of the legendary promoter Manny Greenhill [founder of Folklore Productions, which Mitch now owns and manages].

[+] – The Monkees version appeared on the posthumous 1989 CD album "**Missing Links, Vol. 2.**" While a member of The Stone Poneys, on "**Volume III**" Linda Ronstadt was the lead vocalist on that trio's 1968 version of the song.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood

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