



Various **"Elko - A Cowboy Gathering"** Dualtone Records

Elko [pop. 18,400] is located in north-eastern Nevada and the town played host to first Cowboy Poetry Gathering in late January 1985. The audience on that occasion only numbered in the hundreds, and they came to hear a small number of poets perform their work. These days the annual audience approaches five figures, while an almost countless number of poets and the pickers celebrate all aspects of the cowboy life via the spoken word, instrumental, or the marriage of melody and lyric. This 2CD release **"Elko - A Cowboy Gathering"** features a 40 track mix of *down home* narratives and cowboy music captured at the 20th anniversary Cowboy Poetry Gathering in 2004.

Standout spoken track must be Janine Haig's anxiety filled performance "Not Gone," in which a wife faces up to the future while hardly believing the loss of a husband recently gored by a bull. Lyn Messersmith's "The Time It Never Rained" is a heartfelt prayer all too familiar to cowboy's who wait patiently for a drought to break. The latter pair of true-to-life contributions are balanced by humour and wit, for instance, in Jesse Smith's droll "Doctor, Doctor" and Paul Zarzyski's wacky "Bizarzyski – Mad Bard & Carpenter Savant of Manchester, Montana – Feed The Finicky Birds." "Equus Caballus" by Joel Nelson is a spoken tribute to the four-legged beast on which mankind, indigenous and immigrant, and their offspring, has the traversed the North American continent for nearly five hundred years. If you're up for some ribald comedy, the Australian sounding voice of Long John Best delivers "Saving Grace Is Saying Thank You," the tale of an energetic old couple. All in all, there are poets, male and female, and voices young and old. The youngest on this collection appears to be eleven-year old Oscar Auker, who gives a fine, nuance filled, delivery of Georgia poet Joel Hayes' "Full Value," the tale of a lucky gambling man.

It's thematically fitting that Janine Haig's poem is followed by Andy Wilkinson's eulogy for a cowboy, "Angels Can Do No More." The latter song first appeared on Wilkinson's 1992 Adobe Records album **"Deep In The Heart."** As for other musicians/bands on **"Elko"** who have a track record [*excuse the terrible pun!*] for having delved into the musical world of the cowboy on albums they have released, there are contributions from Hot Club of Cowtown, Michael Martin Murphey, Ian Tyson – supported by the Two Gords [Maxwell & Matthews], and Tom Russell aided by his eternal sideman Andrew Hardin, plus Mad Paul Zarzyski.

If you've never explored the world of the cowboy poetry and song, **"Elko - A Cowboy Gathering"** is a thoroughly entertaining and varied place to start.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

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