



Chris Vallillo **"The Dance"** Gin Ridge Records

Chris Vallillo is an Illinois based singer/songwriter whose songs have regularly documented Midwestern life, whether it's within the family situation, or on some broader landscape. Vallillo's fifth recording opens with his composition **"The Dance,"** a song title that already possesses quite a history. Garth Brooks penned a tune of the same title and went on to enjoy a # 1 Country Hit Single with it during 1990, while Tom Russell and the late Carl Brouse penned a memorable number bearing that title over two decades ago concerning *"the cycle of life."* Going even further back in time, the 1977 album **"Innocent Victim"** by British progressive rock band Uriah Heep contained a reggae inflected tune titled "The Dance." Without offering an open invitation, doubtless there have been other songs bearing this title.

The narrator in Vallillo's "The Dance" recalls the joyful times spent with a playful five-year old named Emily. There's reference to games of *"hide and seek,"* fits of five year old giggles, the sharing of personal secrets and more, but it's Vallillo's waltz rhythm melody that truly drives this tune – *"Spinning 'round and around she and I, To some gossamer melody that only the two of us here."* In the liner footnote to this tune, Vallillo recalls that courting his wife was a hard enough task, but her young daughter meant there was also a parallel second courtship. By way of the commenting on the diplomacy and tact that had to be employed in nurturing that second relationship, the lyric includes the astute *"But there's always the place where the curtain descends, Without me."*

The first of five cover songs in this collection is "Hopelessly Midwestern," Joel Mabus' amusing summary of the mindset of folks who live in Middle America. Mabus, a Belleville, Illinois bred folksinger, like Vallillo, holds a degree in anthropology. The song first appeared on his 1990 album **"Firelake,"** and considering that the lyric mentions the only American president never to be elected, Gerald R. Ford [1974-1977], I'd hazard a guess that the song is of an even much earlier vintage. The prayer like lyric "Let Them In, Peter" was supposedly found scribbled on a piece of paper by an American nurse who was serving in a Philippines hospital during WWII. Her daughter, Noreen Flannery, passed the poem to John Gorka, who promptly added a few lines and penned a melody. David Wilcox included the song on his 1991 album **"Home Again,"** while it took its composer a while longer to cut it. Gorka's version first appeared on the 1997 Red House compilation **"House On Fire II"** and then on the album **"The Company You Keep"** [2001]. Vallillo's interpretation of this song about death in battle that came too quickly for too many young men is truly heartfelt, and underpinned by some fine slide and finger-picked guitar. Over sixty years on, the subject matter of "Let The In, Peter" is no less current or poignant.

Vallillo's previous recordings have included instrumentals, and **"The Dance"** follows that already established tradition, twice over. "Sunday Drivin' On A Monday Afternoon" is a slide guitar instrumental featuring Vallillo on dobro, while on the penultimate track Chris "Emily's Waltz" plays a 1880's Dan Van Antwerp dulcimer that he restored. The lines to "Diamonds Falling From The Sky" are full of outdoor winter-tide images and concurrent indoor activities, while the title came for the Vallillo's young daughter in reference to snow falling. I've always loved songs about horses, and in Garnet Rogers' "Small Victory" a mare and one time race winning horse, long past her best and supposedly barren, goes on to bring a foal into the world. The song first appeared on Garnet's album **"Small Victories"** [1990]. For almost two decades the town of Rushville, Illinois was Vallillo's base, and "I'm Movin' On" is a song of parting that recalls the day when it came time for him to move on.

“Homemade Ice Cream” is Chris’s joyous recollection, drawn from boyhood, of first tasting the product, while Greg Brown’s tale of a small town called “Early” first appeared on the album “**44 & 66**” [1980]. Throughout his recording career, Vallillo has championed the case for simpler times now long gone, as well as chronicling the gradual disappearance of small town America and “Homemade Ice Cream” is a worthy example of his unique approach. Though never stated, there’s an undercurrent of *“We’ll meet again”* in Chris’s lyric to the hymn like “Some Sweet Day” – *“Some sweet day there will come a time, I’m gonna hold her hand in mine.”* As if to close a chapter on his life with a prayer aimed at the future, “**The Dance**” reaches a climax with Vallillo’s perceptive interpretation of the, over a century old, Stephen Foster classic “Hard Times Come Again No More.”

“**The Dance**” is available on the web from www.CDBaby.com

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 08/05.