



Amanda Shires “**West Cross Timbers**” Amanda Shires Records

A decade and a half ago, still barely a teen, Amanda Shires held her first violin, and within a handful of years was performing on the instrument alongside the legendary Tommy Allsup. Fresh from the recently released “**Sew Your Heart With Wires**,” the triumphant and delectable [debut] duo set with touring partner Rod Picott, Shires’ sophomore solo album opener “Upon Hearing Violins” finds her melodically come careering out of the starting gate like the Texas [musical] tornado that she is. Far from being autobiographical, on this opening cut, and with some urgency, the female narrator breathes fire since she’s recently been dumped. From the opening line - *“I hope I haunt you good”* – this amounts to one woman you would not want to cross. Ever.

Love that’s departed is also the undercurrent that flows through “Unwanted Things,” and toward the close Amanda perfectly encapsulates the situation with *“Now what do you do with all her unwanted things, So tightly you cling to them, but you’re one of them just the same.”* Shires’ delivers the “I Kept Watch Like Doves” lyric in short staccato bursts. Basically speaking it’s a razor sharp 21st century redux of “Frankie & Johnny.” Early on, the no nonsense narrator intones *“It’s important that you tell the truth to get along”* and when he chooses to utter none his days end, four bullets embedded in his chest. Launched by a variation of the “Unwanted Things” guitar intro, the fragile sounding narrator in “Put Me To Bed” aches for love and the waver in Shires’ voice flawlessly sums up her emotions.

The album title turns up in the lyric to the autobiographical “Mineral Wells,” wherein Shires reflects upon the joy and pathos of her life growing up in Texas. West Cross Timbers is the name given to a long, narrow wooded region in North Central Texas, and of that area, in the chorus, she sings *“My arms reach for the Brazos River, Pines and cypress and the west cross timbers, And oh I know it shows, I’m another one just thirsting for my home.”* Penned by Rod Picott, “Angels And Acrobats” appeared on his sophomore disc “**Stray Dogs**.” Here, it’s given a swing treatment and if I’m not mistaken there was a beaming smile on Amanda’s countenance as she sang while [with some humour and only occasionally] plucking the low violin string with her thumb.

Lust filled but certainly not in love, at the outset of “Rings And Chains” the narrator sets out the ground rules. *“I said dear it’s not forever, It’s just because we’re both alone, Come around here when the sun goes dark, Let’s be horses in the sheets.”* The ballad paced “Days In Blankets” witnesses the arrival of love arrives but my the closing verse it has departed. Penned by Shires and her [violin] mentor Lanny Fiel, “Keep Them Dogs From Barkin” is a happy-go-lucky number set at a walking pace. Sadness permeates the penultimate track “Mariann Leola,” possibly for someone close who passed on prematurely. Penned almost ninety years back by John Schonberger, Richard Coburn and Vincent Rose and initially popularised by Paul Whiteman, Shires closes this sophomore set with “Whispering” – swing style? Why naturally.

“**West Cross Timbers**” was produced by Shires in partnership with Picott [guitar] and the latter’s long time collaborator David Henry [cello, piano, organ]. Also aiding and abetting Shires’ engaging voice and violin playing during the recording sessions were Paul Slivka [bass], Steve Byam [pedal steel] and Rich Malloy [drums, chain]. All in all, Amanda and the boys done good.

Folkwax score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

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