

Toby Keith CLANCY'S TAVERN

Hump Head Records
HUMP117

★★★★☆

Toby at his finest ...

Throughout the 1990s Oklahoman Toby Keith was one of country music's most underrated vocalists despite a string of chart-topping singles. He was writing and singing atypically pop-sounding songs that played out so smoothly they were easy to miss, often leaning closer to Neil Diamond than Merle Haggard. He broke through to a much wider audience initially with the country-rap of *I Wanna Talk About Me*, followed by the flag-waving ultra-patriotic *Courtesy Of The Red, White & Blue (The Angry American)*. This led to him setting up his own Show Dog Records and becoming an outspoken American patriot with his political stance often overshadowing what Toby Keith does best—thoughtful, well-written songs about relationships and the ordinary everyday guy. His finest artistic moment came, ironically, with his second album, *BOOMTOWN*, way back in 1994. Despite a couple of missteps, Toby comes close to topping that album with *CLANCY'S TAVERN*.

With a march like rhythm, opener *Made In America* offers stunning lyrics that drive home his message to the masses and could so easily be transferred lyrically to *Made In The UK*. Still standing firmly on his soapbox he follows that with *I Need To Hear A Country Song*, a song that once again will resonate with many, but sadly will fall on deaf ears when it comes to American country radio programmers and dare I say it, those suited and well-turned out CMA executives who are more concerned with numbers than the down-home country music they are supposedly championing. The title song, based very loosely on a real American bar owned years ago by Toby's grandmother, is a good old-fashioned country story song that features his deep yet velvety singing voice to perfection. He maintains the strong country kick with *Tryin' To Fall In Love* a light-hearted song with fun lyrics and twangy guitars and fiddles adding that down-home vibe.

Softly plucked guitars set the mood for the cry-in-the-beer *Just Another Sundown*. Beautifully done with fiddles and steel guitar and though he might not be no Haggard or Jones, there's a lot of emotion that penetrates the heart and soul. *Beers Ago* is toe-tapper with an infectious melody; a natural radio-

friendly tune but with great lyrics and very little froth. But for me it's the mid-tempo ballads that are Toby's forte, especially ones that are as well-written as *South Of You* and *Club Zydeco Moon*. His subtle, emotional delivery might veer a little on the glossy side but it still packs an emotional punch. We're now moving towards the one weak spot, yet it's the one track that has brought Toby much notoriety. *Red Cup Solo* is a mindless barroom singalong with no artistic credibility at all. It suits the lowest common denominator of listeners and is already being picked up by lazy djs who will jump on anything to reel in listeners with instant dross a la Chuck Berry's *My Ding A Ling*, or that awful *Shaddap You Face*. Yeah, I know these songs are fun, great at singing in large arenas, footie matches, etc. Maybe I'm a party pooper, but they just leave me cold in much the same way as watching short-skirted teenage girls stumbling up and down our high streets at 2am in the morning ... they are closely connected and it's part of the human race dumbing down and allowing standards to not just slip, but to tumble head-first into the gutter. Far superior is the heartfelt *I Won't Let You Down* and the laid-back *Chill-Axin'* Toby's weary vocal so convincing on the latter. Then you have the bonus of four live tracks recorded in New York City with the star-studded Incognito Bandito led by Kenny Greenberg on lead guitar. A fine revival of Waylon's *High Time (You Quit Your Low Down Ways)*, a good run-through of the timeless *Truck Drivin' Man* and closing with a horn-dominated rendition of Chuck Berry's *Memphis*. Overall an excellent album, and if you're like me, you can easily skip over the *Red Cup Solo*. **Alan Cackett**

www.humpheadcountry.com

Tom Pacheco LUMINOL

Frogs Claw Records

★★★★

*Another 'wake up
and view reality'
song collection from
Pacheco*

According to that venerable almanac in the sky Wikipedia, LUMINOL is used by forensic investigators to detect trace amounts of blood left at crime scenes as it reacts with iron found in hemoglobin, even if the blood has been cleaned or removed. It's also used by biologists in cellular assays for the detection of copper, iron, and cyanides, in addition to the detection of specific proteins.



The sub-title of this thirteen song disc is: the Houston Sessions, and it was recorded concurrent with Pacheco playing a series of Texas dates. Produced by Patty Sanders (Tom's sister, memorialised in the song *Shadow Of A Seagull*) at Sanders Sound, supporting Pacheco's acoustic guitar, harmonica and vocal there are contributions from local performers Brian Kalinec (lead and rhythm guitar), Bill Ward (lead guitar, keyboard) and Tony Sanders (electric bass, keyboard). In his liner note, Pacheco relates how he attempted, with these songs, to: 'put my finger around this nation's pulse at this time of its history in which uncertainty, nervousness, anger, betrayal and a sense of being helpless, fill the uneasy winds that blow through our collective hearts.'

Now in his fifth decade as a recording artist, Pacheco's lyrics have (previously) leant heavily upon historic events, recent and past—and the lessons society learned, or for that matter did not learn—furthermore, Tom's not averse to a little futuristic crystal ball gazing. That's pretty much the thrust of *LUMINOL*, wherein the opening song *While We Looked The Other Way* finds him target corporate capitalism, an ill that he perceives has poisoned every facet of life in the land of the free. The anaesthetised masses, meantime, like couch potatoes watch: 'Dancing With The Stars with stupid grins'—it truly saddens me that shows like this and its tiresome fleece the citizenry phone-in ilk are British concepts!

In the spirit of *Robert & Ramona*, *The Cumberland Robbery* explores unemployment, poverty, desperation and crime, while coincidence and humour pervade *Big Jim's Honey* delivering a high unlike any other. The Human Rights Act 1998 is the most unfit for intended purpose piece of British legislation (ever), while *You Tube*, similarly, seemed like a good idea at the time. Sadly, it also has become prone to unlegislated abuse! A successful, but ultimately lonely, female Wall Street lawyer and a male airline pilot facing divorce appear in *Blues In The Key Of Mississippi*. The country-tinged *Texecution* requires no subjective clarification, while the ensuing call to stand fast and stand together, *Solidarity*, appeared on the recently reviewed 2-CD Pacheco retrospective *THE SECRET HITS VOL. II*. The apocalyptic *The Plastic Bag From Wal-Mart*, is followed by the closing selection and historic summation *A World Without America*.

Arthur Wood

www.tompacheco.com