



Dar Williams **"Promised Land"** Razor & Tie Records

The 'normally I dig my heels in and pig-headedly resist' narrator of the express train paced album opener "It's Alright" reflects on the concept of 'change.' Now there's no doubting Williams' intelligence, and while her lyrics are image filled and clever the consequence is opaqueness, sic. *"Because I have seen insane things, All those grand, historic paintings, Morning light on polished steel and burnished pride, Anxious smiles encased in whalebone, Spines of steel from head to tailbone, Cannons poised to blast the turning of the tide."* Brooklyn based Lara Meyerratken [aka El May], who plays keyboards on the album, co-penned with Williams the gentler paced "Book Of Love," an almost accessible take on 'will I win, or will I lose in the love stakes?' The ensuing "The Easy Way," subjectively ploughs the same furrow, while "The Tide Falls Away" was co-written by Williams and Gary Louris [The Jayhawks].

The pace and diversity of life is measured [and found lacking] in the lyrically and melodically insistent "Buzzer," while "The Business Of Things" includes the line *"Change, it's the racecar of time."* The dour "You Are Everyone" opens with the line *"I went and found a house in the northern woods,"* and is followed by the slightly more positive and upbeat "Go To The Woods" whereon Dar is vocally supported by Suzanne Vega. The rural "Holly Tree" lyric leavened by birth and death, bears the stamp 'sounds traditional.'

Preceding the closing cut, there's a couple of cover tunes. Taken from their 1999 album **"Utopia Parkway,"** "Troubled Times" was penned Adam Schlesinger and Chris Collingwood of New Jersey pop combo Fountains Of Wayne. Stephen Trask is a Connecticut bred, New York based musician/composer and "Midnight Radio" is taken from his score to the musical **"Hedwig And The Angry Inch,"** wherein the principle character becomes a pun'n'club rock singer following a bungled sex-change operation! Rob Hyman of The Hooters co-produced and also played on Dar's **"The Beauty Of The Rain,"** and contributed to the more recent **"My Better Self"** [2005]. The **"Promised Land"** album closer "Summerday," an exposition of the cycle of life, was penned by the pair. There is most definitely an arboreal theme running through this collection, since the opening verse of the latter song includes *"Soon we found the woods that we'd call, The forest of Arden for to play"* - the Forest of Arden is supposedly Shakespeare's setting for **"As You Like It,"** but a number of scenes take place in French duchy, thereby raising the specter of the Ardennes forest. Sometimes fiction mimics fact, but then someone once mused *"All the world's a stage."*

Clever, opaque, repetitious and more, **"Promised Land"** was helmed by L.A. based, Rockford, Illinois bred pop production guru Brad Wood [Smashing Pumpkins, Liz Phair, Pete Dinklage]. On her seventh studio outing, aiding and abetting those musicians I've already mentioned are solo artist Marshall Crenshaw [guitar], Greg Leisz [guitar], drummer Travis McNabb [ex-Vigilantes of Love, Better Than Ezra] and guitarist Pelle Hillstrom [Modwheelmood].

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 09/08.