



Peter Rowan & Tony Rice **“Quartet”** Rounder Records

The Quartet as seen posing on the front cover of this CD liner booklet is composed, left to right, recent but now former Uncle Earl alumni Sharon Gilchrist [mandolin, vocals], a seated Tony Rice [lead guitar], Peter Rowan [guitar, vocals], and Austin, Texas based Two High String band alumni Bryn Davies [bass, vocals].

“Quartet” opens and closes, respectively, with a familiar and a new Peter Rowan composition and between those bookends there are three more familiar examples of his work. The aforementioned opener, “Dust Bowl Children,” is a recollection of an era when life was filled with hardship, and was the title cut of Rowan’s 1990 NAIRD winning Album of the Year. A restrained reading of Townes Van Zandt’s “To Live Is To Fly,” is followed by Rowan’s early solo career chestnut “The Walls Of Time.” The still constant love of a woman now mouldering in the cold, cold earth is the [hardly original] theme that frames the lyric of the latter early 1980’s song. The traditional “Shady Grove,” performed here as an instrumental, provides the band members with the opportunity to stretch out on their instruments. Yawn. Returning to the ‘glory days’ of the mid 1970’s and, Old And In The Way, a short-lived aggregation that featured Rowan, David Grisman and the now deceased trio of Jerry Garcia, Vassar Clements and John Kuhn, the Rowan/Rice quartet perform “Moonlight Midnight” - probably Peter’s best-known composition. This ‘new’ version, almost eight minutes in duration, provides Rice with another opportunity to insert an extended, rate of knot guitar break.

Composed by drummer Jay Dee Daugherty and ‘punk rock’s poet laureate’ Patti Smith, “Trespases” is most definitely the left-field song choice on **“Quartet,”** and made its public debut on Smith’s 2004 CBS debut **“Trampin’.”** The chorus of this heart worn reflection on life – no doubt based on the prayer that contains the phrases *“forgive us our....”* and *“as we forgive them that....”* – runs to *“Trespases stretch like broken fences, Winding as they may, Trespases stretch like broken fences, Hope to mend them one day”* and Smith’s song constitutes the most original segment of this collection. “The Sunny Side Of The Mountain” launches a segue of well-known bluegrass standards that also features the six minute plus “Cold Rain And Snow” and the brimstone, hellfire and gunfire inspired “Guardian Angels.” The lyric to “Let The Harvest Go To Seed” is a tribute to the late Bill Monroe [d. 1996] – circa 1964/67 Rowan was one of this musical giant’s Blue Grass Boys – and the song previously appeared on Peter’s **“Bluegrass Boy”** [1996]. Strange to relate Peter’s younger brother Lorin penned a ‘pop’ song of the same name, but it’s Peter’s “Perfection” *‘call and response’* gospel style number that closes this album.

I’ve always retained the thought that Rowan’s vocal sound is, on occasions, akin to the eerie wilderness sound of a howling wolf. Luckily we’re spared the yodel throughout this collection. It’s hardly a surprise that the twelve songs are expertly performed – albeit predictably rote, and since most are familiar fare the question arises *“And the point of this selection of songs was what?”*

Folkwax Score 5 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 01/07.