



Bill Staines “**Journey Home**” Red House Records

On this collection Staines lyrically reflects upon *the passage of time* by way of a selection of thirteen songs he has heard, found, or written, during his almost forty year long career as a performing musician. The opening cut was penned by Montreal raised song scribe Bruce Murdoch and dates from the mid-sixties. Murdoch contributed four cuts to the early era Elektra compilation “**Singer Songwriter Project**” including the opening song here, “Rompin’ Rovin’ Days.” Thematically it’s a song about hobos from the days of Paxton’s “Ramblin’ Boy” and the ilk. In pursuit of the same subject, later in the set, Staines covers the late Goebel Reeves [aka The Texas Drifter, the Singing Bum and more] “Hobo’s Lullaby,” a song that Woody Guthrie cut and popularised during the 1940’s.

Mostly ballad paced “**Journey Home**” features seven cover songs, three traditional numbers and a trio of Staines originals. A summation to life’s final journey “Bound For The Promised Land” aka “The Pioneer’s Prayer” was penned by Samuel Stennet – a Baptist minister - and dates from the late eighteenth century, while in relation to the immensity of the universe “Tell Ol’ Bill (This Mornin’, This Evenin’, So Soon)” focuses upon the fleeting passage of one man’s life. The latter tune was drawn from Carl Sandberg’s “**American Songbag**” a *standard songwriting work* that was published way back in 1927. Buffy Sainte-Marie’s “The Piney Wood Hills,” another number that focuses upon the *rambling and roving* life, dates from the sixties, Paul MacNeil’s “Love Was Easy” amounts to the tale of “*my one true love*” which, sadly for the narrator, also became a *love lost*, while Mary McCaslin’s heaven bound, cowboy fantasy “Prairie In The Sky” first saw the light of day on her 1975 Rounder/Philo album of the same name.

A perennial favourite, the traditional “Stewball” is undoubtedly the inspiration for the legion of [original] horse [racing] songs that have followed, while the other traditional tunes here amount to the closing pair of tracks “Pretty Saro” – a song of unrequited love, and the self-explanatory Shaker hymn, “How Can I Keep From Singing.” Bill’s original compositions on this, in the main, acoustic sounding collection includes the album title cut, a song of [eventual, heaven bound] homecoming for a weary traveller. Another thread that permeates [many of] the songs in this collection is of a *life lived well and to the full*. Acknowledging the foregoing, the centrepiece on “**Journey Home**” falls to “A Rancher Turns 80 / The Years” penned for octogenarian and one time Oregon rancher and *lover of the land*, John Bishop. Staines’ third and final contribution here, “The Philosopher’s Song,” lyrically hints at a spiritual journey, wherein the narrator questions a restless seeker about their search for truth and life’s rich experiences.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

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