



### Iain Matthews "The Notebook Box Set" Coast To Coast

The Notebook Box Set contains five discs, and, chronologically, four of them **"Nights In Manhattan," "Live Alone," "Intimate Wash"** and **"Camouflage"** have previously seen the light of day. In fact **"Nights In Manhattan"** was originally a twelve song disc, which, in 1997, reappeared with four extra tracks and bearing the title **"Nights In Manhattan (And Points West)."** It's the 1997 version of the disc that is included in the box set. Making its debut, **"Woodshedding"** is the latest addition to the Notebook Series.

From one somewhat *obtuse* point of view we have to thank Led Zeppelin lead vocalist, Robert Plant, for these discs. Circa 1986 and based once more in Los Angeles, Matthews had abandoned his performing/writing/recording career for one in A&R. That year Iain and Robert were, separately, invited to perform at the annual Fairport Convention Reunion in Cropredy, Oxfordshire. Based on what he had heard during Iain's Cropredy set, Plant cornered Matthews backstage and harangued him to *"get back to performing in public."* Within a couple of years Matthews had reactivated his performing career. In fact, the first Notebook release **"Nights In Manhattan"** [1991] was recorded at New York's Bottom Line during May 1988, and was initially available as a cassette titled **"Live."**

In the world of acoustic music some performers expose their *new* songs to public scrutiny before recording them in the studio, and Matthews is a *graduate* of that *college*. Based on audience reaction, the performer can gauge the merit of the new creation. The Notebook discs, a limited-edition series, whether *unadorned live recordings* or *voice and guitar studio recordings* [usually completed in a single day or session], were an attempt by Matthews – be they originals or covers - to *revisit old songs* and also *expose new ones*. In the process, the Notebook discs provided fans with a collectible item, as well as a glimpse into the *evolving* life of a particular song.

Of the fourteen *voice and guitar* recordings on **"Woodshedding,"** Matthews' "Fences" appears for the first time on any recording. As for the album, it was recorded in Austin, Texas during March 1999. Chronologically, the **"Woodshedding"** versions of Matthews' compositions "Close To The Bone," "Fading Fast" [a *wonderful* song – in fact one of Iain's finest, was apparently written way back in the late eighties], "Funk And Fire," "Tailspin" and "She's A Mystery" actually predate other already released interpretations. Based on the foregoing, the versions appearing here are *historical templates* for what came later. They also form part of the *charm*, as well as the *perspective*, which the Notebook Series offers the avid listener/fan. In addition to the foregoing **"Woodshedding"** includes Mike Nesmith's "Propinquity," which Matthews first cut in 1973 on the Nesmith produced album **"Valley Hi."** Another seventies song, **"Darkness, Darkness,"** penned by Youngbloods leader, Jesse Colin Young, first cut by

Iain in 1976 also reappears here. The only other **“Woodshedding”** cover is Van Morrison's “And It Stoned Me” which Iain featured in his show during The Swinelakers 1998 European tour.

Without entering into a track-on-track diatribe of the contents of the remaining four discs, suffice to say that the pattern set by **“Woodshedding”** is repeated throughout the box set. **“Live Alone”** and **“Intimate Wash”** are studio recordings made, respectively, in Austin during 1991 and 1993. **“Camouflage”** is a compilation of live recordings that date in one instance from 1971, while the remaining cuts hail from various continents over the period 1990 through 1995. Overall, the box set features seventy-five cuts of which fifty-two are Matthews originals or co-writes. Iain has long been an astute judge of what constitutes a great *cover* song, and the set includes material from the [individual] pens of Richard Thompson, Richard Farina, Tim Hardin, Jules Shear and Steve Young. The previously released discs all sport new artwork and a 12 page, full colour liner booklet accompanies the set.

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

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