



Mickey Newbury “**A Long Road Home**” Long Hall/Mountain Retreat Productions

Closing out at a tad under sixty-minutes duration and opening with “In ’59,” an eleven-minute long autobiographical *tour de force*, history may well record that “**A Long Road Home**” is the best album Newbury has constructed. In a life that has been significantly studded with musical gems, it is pleasing to note [and hear] that time has dulled none of his skills. If anything, here, his talents are more focused than ever.

At the age of twenty-nine, in 1969, on his Mercury album “**Looks Like Rain**,” Newbury linked the eight songs, using the sounds of *rain [and passing thunder]* – hardly unexpected considering the title of the collection, *wind chimes* and the *sounds of a passing train* [including its *lonesome whistle*]. *Water lapping on the seashore* and the sound of *seabirds* additionally feature on this collection. Those sound effects have remained Newbury’s trademark for four decades, and they even leak into the opening bars of some of the songs – to consistently, stunning effect. OK, Jimmy Webb used sound effects to link the tracks on the Fifth Dimension’s **The Magic Garden** [1968], but Newbury’s interpretation witnessed the concept become almost symphonic in execution. On “**Looks Like Rain**” he even employed a sitar, a somewhat adventurous move, at that time, for an acknowledged Nashville hit songwriter. Although Nashville thought Newbury had slipped into *their mould*, he was always a rebel – and always light years ahead of his time.

One other consistent element to be aware of is that, lyrically, Newbury possesses a penchant for things plaintive. The two-minute long, second cut “I Don’t Love You” exemplifies that approach. I berated Lucinda last year for the *paltry* twenty-one words she employed on the *well under par* “Lonely Girls.” Employing the same minimalist approach – here, in repeating a mere seven words Newbury conjures a piece of rare magic, a masterpiece of melancholy - *I don’t love you, anymore, she said* - accompanied by the marriage of thunder, rain, an acoustic guitar and a fiddle. “Here Comes The Rain, Baby” hails from his 1968 RCA debut “**Harlequin Melodies**,” and further confirms Newbury’s affection for conditions that are damp [but never dreary!]. A thirty-second long string ensemble piece, “A Moment With Heather,” leads into the bluegrass tinged “Where Are You Darlin’ Tonight?”, while “Maybe” which follows, bears the line “*Maybe.....I never did love you,*” and could be construed as a reply to the seven-word epic mentioned earlier. If it is classic creations that you seek, the loss of love [and the loss of, once great lives] expressed in “So Sad” is heartrending. The lines “*Elvis died in Memphis, boys, they nailed him in one hand, Haley died in Corpus Christi, died without a dime. I am dead in Tennessee, they buried me alive,*” are delivered like metal fist in a velvet glove, the final line alluding to a rift with Nashville. Newbury has been an Oregon resident for many years. In the title cut, the opening “*How I long to feel the salty wind off Galveston Bay in my face once again, A warm southern wind on my weather-worn skin, Perhaps I would not feel so old,*” are the words of a Houston born Texan, his days almost done, who longs for home. The closing, “116 Westfield Street,” is a touching and fond recollection of a now dilapidated house, which in better days, had been the narrator’s childhood home. For many memorable tunes [and years], thanks Mickey.....

Folkwax rating – 10 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

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