



Tom Pacheco **"The Secret Hits - The Best Of Tom Pacheco Vol. 1"** Frogs Claw Records

I guess the appendage **"The Best Of Tom Pacheco Vol. 1"** is a clear indication that further compilations will follow this thirty-one song, 2CD release. When Pacheco arrived in Ireland in the late 1980's his catalogue of recordings from the preceding two decades amounted to three solo albums, a duo disc, one album by the quartet Euphoria and a few singles by his late 1960's Greenwich Village band The Ragamuffins. Career long Tom has been a prolific writer, while successfully accomplishing the recording and release of his songs was always "something else." This retrospective apart, during the past two decades – OK, eighteen years - Pacheco has released thirteen solo albums, two duo discs with Norwegian based solo star Steinar Albrigtsen, plus the Scandinavian band project **"The Long Walk"** [2004].

"Bare Bones & Barbed Wire" [1997] apart, **"The Secret Hits"** draws on those releases. In truth a significant portion of that 'strictly acoustic, recorded in one night' 1997 solo release reprised material that had appeared on Tom's releases, 1989 through 1996. Balancing the solo cuts, is one song each from the duo outings **"Big Storm Comin'"** [1993] and **"Nobodies"** [2000] and three tracks from the rather excellent **"The Long Walk."** And as we shall see, at least one of the songs predates the late 1980's.

Tom's lyrics have consistently featured events involving real life characters, on some occasions accurately and factually - on others by way of 'fashioning a [credible] fiction.' In that regard the passing of the Kennedy brothers, John and Robert is recalled, respectively, in "Jessica Brown" [the opening track on Disc 1] and Disc 2's "Juan Romero." There's an unflattering reappraisal of "Teddy Roosevelt" and his exploits in Cuba, while "Che" was once the *"most wanted man in the world."* Pacheco revisits the legend of Jack The Ripper in "The Journal Of Graeme Livingstone." A few years back Tom played a gig in London's Whitechapel district – *"the Ripper's killing zone"* – and soon afterwards felt compelled to pen the song. Fiction meets fact in the song title, since Graeme has been Tom's U.K. tour manager for many years. Woody Guthrie and Ramblin' Jack Elliott were travelling companions during the early 1950's and "Woody & Jack" focuses on Guthrie's last visit to the West Coast. Already displaying symptoms of Huntington's Chorea – *"Through ranches, farms and truck stops, Jack saw Woody's trembling hands"* - Woody was subsequently hospitalised. In his lyric Tom mentions Pretty Polly Canyon, thereby referencing Woody's old friend, actor and fellow musician, the late Will Geer – Grandpa in **"The Waltons."**

Contemporary topics have similarly been a source of rich lyrical pickings for Pacheco as evidenced by the Disc 1 tracks "Midnight Waters Of The Rio Grande" [illegal immigrants], "Last Blue Whale In The Ocean" [destruction of the environment], "The Heavens Are For Wonder, Not For War" [politics and greed], "Merchant Of Death" [callous, financially motivated gunrunning], "Memorial Day" [the innocent generations who have perished in senseless wars], while the slyly worded, ironic "Freida's Secret Garden" reveals that this songwriter possesses a wry sense of humour. The passage of time irrevocably brings change - as to whether the change has been positive and beneficial is assessed at the outset of Disc 2 in "There Was A Time" and "What Happened To The America I Used To Know?" If you seek moments of unerring lyrical beauty there's "Blue Montana Sky" and "Shadow Of A Seagull," while Tom explores the male/female conundrum in "Provincetown" and "Trust Your Heart Always"

"Eagle In The Rain" [1989], Tom's first recording for Ireland's Round Tower Records, opened with "Robert & Ramona" and this tale of a modern day Bonnie & Clyde reappears here. Sonically an electric blues "A Woman Like You" dates from Pacheco's mid-eighties days with his electric band, The Hellhounds. The song previously appeared on Pacheco's 1988 cassette-only Irish release **"Dublin Girl,"** a six-song collection that also featured "The Heavens Are For Wonder, Not For War." Pacheco's

exploration of life during the late twentieth and into the new millennium continues apace on Disc 2 with “Norfolk, Little Rock, Memphis” [jobs exported abroad, unemployment ensues], “The Sacred” [a ‘former suit’ embraces sack cloth], “I Had A Dream” [a wish for a perfect world], “Cell Block One” [repatriation and healing], “They’re All Human” [mankind and its ills] and “If I Could Come Back” [reincarnation] and more. Pacheco isn’t big on “*moon*” or for that matter “*spoon*” or “*June*.” Reality and truth are this humanist’s touchstones.

Folkwax Score 9 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 11/07.