



Lori McKenna – NUMBERED DOORS (Album Review) Liz Rose Music

Accomplished and acoustic, Numbered Doors delivers ten 'mighty fine' new Lori McKenna songs.

The initial plan was to cut a five-song, acoustic EP of McKenna's latest creations, supported only by long-time sideman Mark Erelli who would also occupy the producer's chair. Having booked a couple of days at Chris Rival's Middleville Studio in North Reading, Massachusetts, on the mid-March morning of day two rather than sweeten, with overdubs, those songs completed the previous day, Erelli suggested they up the ante and record a further handful of tunes. The result is *Numbered Doors*, a ten-song collection of vignettes about love (and marriage), success and failure and pretty much every stopping-off point between. As for the title song, a clue to the place of its birth resides in the backlit, female shadow that traverses the *motel corridor* in Erelli's liner artwork. On her web site, of the legion of ghosts who expended time within motel room walls, McKenna muses "...the stories that started or ended. Think of all the feelings given into and the ones ignored. All the gossip that room could spit out about all the strangers that have come through. Ourselves included. The love made, the promises, the lies, the turning points and last hopes, the prayers." If the foregoing is a synopsis of the where and what, creation of the accomplished end result simply required two voices, a gaggle of 6/12 stringed acoustic guitars (plus a smidgen of mandolin) and two days locked away from public gaze. Mark's time-served, intimate knowledge of Lori's work was obviously a weighty factor in the recording and mixing of this project, and his stringed instrument work is intricate and appropriate without becoming intrusive. Less is often more.....

Lori's name is appended as composer to every song, half-a-dozen of which were co-written. One of the latter, "The Time I've Wasted," opens this collection. Penned with, Grammy winning songwriter/Taylor Swift collaborator, Liz Rose and Jesse Walker - a writer at Liz Rose Music, the world-weary narrator initially reflects on bygone days "*I could have walked around the world a couple of times, I could have swam across the ocean and back again.*" The immensity of her frustration is encapsulated by "*I could have dug out the Grand Canyon with a spoon,*" and while confiding "*For everything I've lost I'm not mad at love*" full-blown aggravation resides in the accumulated "*time I've wasted on you.*" In "Numbered Doors" the bride is married in "*a borrowed dress nobody wanted back,*" following which the happy couple drive off into the sunset. Could this be a tale that ends happily? Bored by a waitressing job in a small town that doesn't even "*...have a 5 and dime,*" the (once young) bride overdoses in a motel room. Singer/songwriter/ recording artist/touring musician Dean Fields, co-writer of "Stranger In His Kiss," was raised in Richmond, Virginia and is currently Nashville based. In the latter title, shooting straight from the hip, the no-nonsense (but extremely suspicious) narrator enquires "*Could a friend like you be the stranger in his kiss?*" While "God Never Made One Of Us To Be Alone" may seem a wordy title, the emotions that McKenna embraces across four-and-a-half minutes are intense and genuine. The second of four Lori (only) penned tunes here, describing

the latter as a diamond significantly undersells it, and her third contribution, which follows, is the equally powerful “All A Woman Wants” – *“She’s the only one you want to be laying beside.”*

Singer/songwriter Drew Kennedy was also raised in Virginia, but he’s Texas based these days. Their “Rose Of Jericho” portrays love that is languishing. Performed as a duet with Erelli, and penned with Brooklyn based Ben Fields, the couple in “Love To Be Cruel For” are still together, but a few steps farther apart relative to “Rose Of Jericho.” Balancing the (foregoing) negative with some positive, having described the necessary ingredients the fourth McKenna original equates to the recipe for a “Good Marriage.” While not detracting one iota from McKenna’s six quality co-writes, (here) the quartet penned on her own simply sparkle. Did I mention that McKenna is in great voice throughout this set? In the penultimate “Three Kids No Husband,” a collaboration with solo recording artist on the rise Brandy Clark, the central character is a waitress/mother who is barely getting by - *“A hand and a shoulder and a referee”* – of whom the narrator ultimately concludes *“A real life hero if you ask me.”* “Starlight” written with Georgia bred, Nashville based hit songwriter Hillary Lindsey and Liz Rose, closes *Numbered Doors*. Therein, expressing a universal emotion, a weary housewife hopes for better times to come.

<http://www.lorimckenna.com/> and <https://myspace.com/lorimckenna/music/songs>

Brought to you from the desk of the Folk Villager.

aka Arthur Wood.

Copyright of this work is retained by Kerrville Kronikles 10/14.