



Rod Picott **"Summerbirds"** Welding Rod Records

Rod Picott's partnership with engineer/producer/cello player David Henry moves on apace with **"Summerbirds"** their fourth consecutive studio collaboration. When Rod toured the U.K. early last Fall he debuted a couple of 'mouth watering' tunes from this collection. Picott's three-piece band featured Lubbock bred violinist Amanda Shires who he had met a handful of months earlier in Austin, Texas at the annual music business extravaganza SXSW. Their performance that night at Leicester's Musician supported by bass and drums constituted one of those musical memories that will stick with me for a long time. Almost a year has drifted by, and now those aforementioned songs and more are featured on **"Summerbirds."**

There's a Springsteenish feel to the electric guitar driven up-tempo opener "Jealous Stars." In the opening verse we're introduced to a woman who had to grow up quickly – *"You never got to be somebody's little girl"* – following which, she became the victim of a love cheat – *"Just a secret heart where you went to hide, With that boy you loved, but all he left you, Was a grass stain there on your party dress."* These days, according to the narrator, her future is way sunnier since *"You're somebody's baby now,"* while viewed from the perspective of the universe *"All the jealous stars they wanna be where you are."* Slowing the pace marginally, electric guitars also take the lead on "Hand Me Down" and there are a couple of interludes where Amanda shines on violin and David Henry bows some trademark cello. Penned by Rod Picott/Slaid Cleaves "Sinner's Prayer" previously appeared on Cleaves **"Wishbones"** [2004]. Featuring the personal summations *"I'm not living like I should," "I keep pretending to be good"* and *"I used to be a better man"* the narrator carries a dark secret although by the songs end we're not privy to its precise nature.

At the outset of "Trouble Girl," the first ballad on **"Summerbirds,"** we're informed that the object of the narrator's affection possesses a *"little paper heart"* and that she's *"so easily torn apart."* Scenes are played out in an air-conditioned Texas movie theatre, driving in a car on rain drenched streets and, rather sensually, in a bedroom – *"Another joke tripping from her tongue, While her nightdress comes undone"* and *"Your brown skin moving cross the white sheets on our bed."* In the ensuing "Just Like Love," another ballad, the focus is on offspring who grow up, vacate 'the nest' and go on to have offspring of their own, while concurrently their parents 'simply' traverse old age. A bluebird and mockingbird are mentioned in the latter lyric, and the cut also features a harmony vocal from Amanda. Cranking up the tempo once again, the lyric to "When Your Bird Won't Fly" references Harper Lee the Monroeville, Alabama born Pulitzer Prize winning author of the best selling **"To Kill A Mockingbird"** [1960] – the only book she has ever had published. The setting in the opening verse of "Something In Spanish" is a taxi with *"the saints hanging down from a chain"* - the location might be Mexico[?] - and this ballad style cut prominently features piano and accordion.

It's Josh Ritter's birthplace, but at the outset of Picott's "Moscow, Idaho" the narrator's focus falls on a young woman who is wearing a *"Little nothing dress"* and currently *"Mama's baby's such a pretty mess."* Experienced at negotiating highs and lows way past the midnight hour, it appears that the principal female is a time-served party girl, *"Methamphetamine says you dance all night, See through heels till the morning light."* The latter track is stripped down to a 'spot on' rendition using acoustic guitar and Picott's voice, with the melody set to a walking pace. The closing line in the opening verse of the earlier "Hand Me Down" runs to *"Now baby you are such a pretty mess"* and appears replicated by my latter "Moscow, Idaho" quote. Given the sensuous lyrical feel of the ballad "Worry Doll," I'd rate it as the 'twin' to "Trouble Girl." The penultimate track "You Can't Talk To Me Like That Anymore" reflects on love that's been lost, and was written by Rod and upstate New York bred musician/recording artist Sean Patrick McGraw, a

one-time Nashville Star competitor. Finally, "Little Bird" is a night-time love song that also references the impermanence of everything in this life *"Now silver and gold, Are just dirt in time."*

In terms of pace Picott truly kicks butt on a few "**Summerbirds**" tracks, but mostly he has 'painted' ballads, some of which 'walk' while others simply 'glide.' That said all eleven Picott originals are never less than hook laden delights.

Folkwax Score 9 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

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