



### Various Artists **"13 Ways To Live"** Red House Records

This charity compilation is the *offspring* of a three piece Austin, Texas based collective who call themselves, Screen Door Music. Namely, Bukka Allen [keyboards, accordion], Brian Standefer [cello] and Robbie Gjersoe [acoustic and electric guitars]. This trio self-released a self-titled instrumental collection in 2000, and monies generated from the sale of **"13 Ways To Live"** will be passed to the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation [ [www.vvaf.org](http://www.vvaf.org) ] a humanitarian organisation that was founded in 1980, by Bobby Muller and John Terzano. Worldwide, VVAF assists the victims of conflict and war. In 1991 VVAF co-founded the campaign to ban landmines, and six years later was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts. At one stage, this collection was to be subtitled **"From Texas With Compassion,"** but those words do not appear anywhere on the liner! All monies generated will be spent, specifically in Iraq, assisting VVAF's Information Management and Mine Action Programs [iMMAP] provide *post-conflict* humanitarian and relief needs for that country's citizens.

According to Standefer, *"Our focus wasn't to advocate a particular political agenda, but to give artists a forum for expression concerning the troubling events that have taken place on our planet in recent years, specifically the war in Iraq."* There's really no need to say more, so let's look at the music.....

The collection opens with Abra Moore's plaintive song of desperation, "100 Miles" – *"Can you hear me? Is anybody listening? Can you see me falling through the sky?"* Jack Ingram's apocalyptic contribution "Edge Of Nowhere," penned by his tour manager Kyle Wieters, closes with the telling *"And on the day that we should end, The last tear fall from our eye, Shall we burn beneath our feet?, Shall we fly up through the sky?,"* while the bridge to David Baerwald's death-filled panorama "If Wishes Were Horses," musically, in [deliberate] contrast to the lyric, possesses a vaudevillian feel.

Eliza Gilkyson's Iraq war expose "Highway 9" – a tribute to *"the little man"* and his cabal - first appeared on her stunning album **"Land Of Milk And Honey"** earlier this year, but the version here, featuring almost the same cast of support players, opens with a Middle Eastern sounding instrumental coda and midway through the cut Eliza harmonises in a voice that I can only describe as [intentionally] Middle Eastern. If there's one cut on this collection that deserves the accolade *classic*, it's Butch Hancock's "The Damage Done." In terms of making a **solo** musical statement, this song is his first contribution since the 1997 album **"You Coulda Walked Around The World,"** and the Texan nails the current debacle out East with the opening verse *"I stand before you even in my sleep, With wide open eyes, To tell you things about yourself, You might not recognise, Like how we fight for love or money, And how we fight for fun, And how we sometimes fight just to see, Some damage done"* and consolidates [hammers home, even] that message through six further verses.

Richard Buckner supplied the music for "The Song Of The Low," the words, *a message from the past*, being those of the German born, English poet Ernest Jones [1819/1869]. "Yo Ho Ho/Big Ol' White Boys" by Terry Allen, the multi-media artist [and Bukka's father], was no doubt thinking about the *cut-throat ways of pirates* when he came up with part of the song title. Supported by his long established *rinky dink* piano playing style, subjectively, Allen's song parodies [the repetition of] history, and telling it like it is closes with *"Yeah Big Ol' White Boys fat with plunder, Satisfy our every need, Rule the world while we get dumber, In the name of Glut, Our Lord and Greed."* Patty Griffin's "Dear Old Friend" was the first vocal track to be cut, of which Bukka Allen has been quoted as saying *"Patty's song was our anchor, we built the album from there."* As for further classic lyrical power, Griffin's tune, an anthem that

contemplates loss, is a close runner to Hancock's effort, as exemplified by *"How will we laugh, just like before, When there is water rising up to our door?"*

The other contributors – apart from Eliza's "Highway 9" all the material featured is previously unreleased - include Alejandro Escovedo [the electrically charged "Notes On Air"], Bukka Allen ["Brand New Day," a song of hope and also a prayer for reconciliation], Will Sexton ["Whittled In The Wind"], Ian Moore ["Things We Carried"] and the collection closes with Screen Door Music's sombre sounding instrumental "Cycles." The release of compilation albums is legion these days and most possess little worth, the contents of far too many being *lacklustre*.

**"13 Ways To Live"** is **far** from being the latter, its contents are not only musically vibrant but support a cause that may go some way to restoring mankind's faith in America as a nation that can display compassion. Do the decent thing and display some dissent...buy this CD!!

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood  
Kerrville Kronikles 10/04

Album Available from : - **Amazon.com** and **CDUniverse**