



Cormac McCarthy **"Curious Thing"** Rakish Tilt Music

**"Curious Thing"** is the first McCarthy release in almost a dozen years, and only his fourth recording in a period spanning two decades. The foregoing hardly qualifies as prolific, so a new McCarthy recording is a major listening event, one to spend considerable time savouring. A self-produced collection, **"Curious Thing"** was recorded at Billy Conway's Hi-N-Dry Studio in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the session band features Duke Levine [guitar, lap steel, dobro, mandolin], Billy Conway [drums] and Kent Allyn [bass]. Fluent, rich, crisp, melodic are all words that come to mind regarding the overall sound of **"Curious Thing."** Plus, we should not forget the bonus of the angelic voices of backing vocalists Kris Delmhorst and Jennifer Kimball.

Seasonal in word and inspiration "Spring Snow," also ponders the loss or passing of friends/acquaintances, and Levine's interpretation of the melody is to die for. Last time around **"Picture Gallery Blues"** [1995] featured the fiddles of Johnny Cunningham and David Mansfield. Sadly, we lost Johnny back in mid-December 2003 and as a mark of respect McCarthy notes in the liner booklet *".....in honour of Johnny Cunningham, there are no fiddles on this album...the only fiddle parts I heard were his."* In the "Spring Snow" lyric Cormac name checks Cunningham with *"I dreamed of Johnny the fiddler, And take five on the bodhran and bow."* While it's not unquestionably correct, neither is it absolutely wrong, and neither is it here and it's not over there either, and that's pretty much the dual launch pad that Cormac employed to create "Curious Thing In The Middle." As the lyric evolves, there is mention *"...it's not poetry it's not a symphony"* and later *"...it's not T.S. Eliot or Bartok, But somewhere in the middle is a song."* As Townes once noted, it was always for the sake of the song.....

Woven into the lyric, the blue-collar narrator, piece-by-piece, reveals facts about himself and his struggle to find his place in the world. As the lyric attests, he has finally discovered a precious place of peace in "The Asylum Of Your Arms." The revelation *"Can't wake up, can't sleep, The medication doesn't work anymore"* is quickly followed by *"I got busted for shooting pigeons, I believe I'll land in jail."* As for the chorus that hinges on the narrator's repeated insight *"Too crazy for the streets, Too normal for the farm."* Having intimated that his boss down at the factory hates him, the narrator adds *"I think it's my lazy eye, My brain just gets fuzzier the harder I try."* A beautifully skewed love song "The Asylum Of Your Arms" closes uncertainly with *"You say that you are leaving me, Baby please don't go, Honey please don't go, Darling please don't go."* Having highlighted the melody that underpins "Spring Snow," it's worth noting that rhythmically "Curious Thing In The Middle" is a wild burbling mountain stream, while "The Asylum Of Your Arms" adopts a sedate walking pace. The latter pairing are also hook laden and oh so wonderfully tuneful. Like his buddy Bill Morrissey, and Bill's buddy Greg Brown, 'spending time with a rod and line' and 'hackle and hair' obviously occupies a special place in Cormac's heart. "Fishing" is Cormac's exposition of that affair.

"Easy As Pi" is light-hearted and fun filled – *"We should be getting smarter, but the math just gets harder,"* while, at the outset of "Second Skin," McCarthy tenderly declares, *"You are my second skin, Where do you stop and I begin."* If you wanted to describe **"Curious Thing"** as an entity, "This Beautiful Place" would be an appropriate title. Subjectively, the song "This Beautiful Place" accepts that life on planet Earth isn't entirely composed 'hearts and flowers,' and that it takes time and effort to succeed. For example *"Good things happen in this terrible place, I get to see your beautiful face, Hear the robin and the morning dove, Put on my shoes and get back in the race."* Strained, the up-tempo "Great Big Day" is the cut to miss in this collection.

McCarthy's "So Many Miles" is another exposition on time and faith. Early on, Cormac's lyric tenders the scenario "*With so many miles on my heart, It took me a long time to find you, With so many miles on my heart, Believing was a hard thing to do.*" By way of encapsulating the 'sweepstake of the heart,' Cormac goes on to deliver the clever "*You try to choose wisely, some wisely decide not to choose.*" "Follow Your Heart," a love song, suggest that you trust your instincts and proceed to live life to the full come what may, while "A Little Something" is an obtuse number that hints at a parting "*Here's a little something, it's the best I can do.*" "**Curious Thing**" ends on a positive note with "While The World Is Sleeping," wherein the narrator attests at the close "*I see tomorrow in your eyes.*"

In your own time Cormac, I'll be waiting to hear your next classic episode. Try not to leave it so long next time.....

Folkwax Score 9 out of 10

**Arthur Wood.**

Kerrville Kronikles 07/06 & 08/06.