



Rosanne Cash "**Rules Of Travel**" Capitol Records

First, let's take a moment to look at the *warp around* liner artwork. To get the full Annie Leibovitz picture you need to open the liner booklet, on its spine [and to its full extent]. Cash stands in the midst of the proverbial *dark and stormy night*, and the wild and foaming sea that rages behind her has already devoured one vessel. In her right hand Rosanne holds a seashell, while in the other there's a compass. One compass point is aimed directly at the shipwreck [behind her], while the other is, I guess, pointing to *the future*. Dressed in a black coat, her hair and the ruffled collar of her blouse are swept by the wind. Unsmiling, Cash gazes upward and landward at some distant point, out of view. Enigmatic !

As if published in a long gone age, there's a deliberately aged/stressed look to the stained inner pages of the liner booklet. The *rules of travel* are not a new concept, we humans are merely susceptible to repeating the same old mistakes.....

Produced by her husband John Leventhal, Cash began work on this recording five years ago, but the birth of her son, Jake - now aged four [to whom she dedicates this album], and the extended loss of her singing voice intervened. Five year on and eleven songs later, the project finally reached the public domain as "**Rules Of Travel**." Of the aforementioned headcount of eleven, there's a trio of covers. "Beautiful Pain," the opening cut, a paean to self-inflicted martyrdom, features a support vocal from Sheryl Crow, and was penned by Canadian Craig Northey. Northey, who plays hand drum on the cut, used to be in the Vancouver based quartet, The Odds and is a solo recording artist. Joe Henry and Jakob Dylan [The Wallflowers] co-wrote "Hope Against Hope," while hubby, John, and Marc "Walking In Memphis" Cohen collaborated on "Three Steps Down." On the latter selection, Cash is joined, on harmony vocals, by Richard and Linda Thompson's son - Teddy. In the *microcosm* that is the world of music, Joe Henry produced Teddy's self-titled debut solo album during Y2K.

The remaining material splits equally into a quartet of songs Rosanne wrote one her own, and four that are collaborations with Leventhal. Well, almost, as the name of Georgia born Robert Burke Warren [ex Fleshtones, Turpentine] is appended to "44 Stories." A productive short story/narrative writer of late, the latter is also the name of a biography that Rosanne is working on currently – lyrically, the opening and final verses close with "*She wants to tell them all to you*" while "*She wants to write them in a book*" is the closing line in verse two. Rosanne is joined by her father on the touchingly autobiographical, "September When It Comes," and there's a noticeable frailty about Johnny's voice as he takes a two verse solo midway through the song. Subjectively the lyric focuses upon the passage of time, the act of forgiveness and effective use of our allotted time here on Earth. As for the title cut, the "*rules*" relate to the sacred path we must learn to negotiate "*inside each other's hearts*," while the topics of time [again !] and memory are explored in "Will You Remember Me."

As for those numbers that Cash wrote on her own, "I'll Change For You" features the voice of Steve Earle. Total submission, by one partner, within a relationship, and the ways in which it can be accomplished with no forfeit – "*And I won't make you pay*" – being the theme. "Western Wall" was the title cut of the Emmylou Harris/ Linda Ronstadt duo album circa 1999, while the "*wall*" is a place that the narrator has found to "*shove her prayers in the cracks*" even though it's "*a crumbling pile of broken stones*." Setting the poetic imagery aside, the latter is just another love song. An olive branch is proffered in "Closer Than I Appear" with the words "*Somewhere inside, I'm reaching out for you*," as a couple seek to resolve their differences, although "*Hey, I'm willing to change*" finds Cash revisiting a theme

exhausted earlier in the set. The situation presented in the latter cut appears superficial, and, frankly, lacks the probing depth that was once a Cash forte. It's almost as if Cash now struggles to recover memories that are fading. Appropriately titled, "Last Stop Before Home" is the closing cut, all about the *"keeper of a very old flame"* – love, and *"the well to a century of tears"* – heartbreak.

If I sound underwhelmed by the contents of this recording, it is because repeated listening did not lift my disappointment. It all sounds totally wonderful, and I figure that's due largely to John Leventhal's considerable input as producer and musician. As for the lyrics, I didn't feel much of anything. Now living happily in New York, an **"Interiors"** or **"The Wheel"** it is not.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

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