



## Patty Griffin **"Children Running Through"** ATO Records

Griffin's 'voice and acoustic guitar' debut recording, **"Living With Ghosts,"** in truth a demo, didn't credit a producer. On each of her subsequent studio recordings – the ones that were officially released, that is - Patty has engaged a different producer. Austin based Mike McCarthy [Spoon, Lee Ann Womack, Trail Of Dead] is the latest addition to her 'List,' and the pair share the 'produced by' credit on this set. As for location, **"Children Running Through"** was recorded in a temporary studio set up in a rented house across the street from Griffin's Austin home.

**"1000 Kisses"** [2001] and **"Impossible Dream"** [2004] found Griffin, in the main, stylishly explore singer/songwriter territory. Folk-rock, roots rock, call it what you will, the latter discs were blessed with melodic story songs of breathtaking grace. Lyrically speaking **"Children Running Through"** possesses a more impressionistic feel, and in parallel with that approach the artist has now added gospel and soul to her melodic curriculum vitae. The bass, brushed drum and vocal album opener, "You'll Remember" has the feel of a pre-WWII composed torch song. Furthermore, it's the shortest cut on **"Children Running Through"** and fulfills the role of Prologue – a summation of the contents of this album even. In terms of storyline what appears to ensue in "Stay On The Ride" is a [question and retort – I hesitate to say, answer] conversation between an aged passenger and the driver of a bus. The instruments on this cut possess a distinctly sharp metallic sound, from Michael Longoria's cymbals to Jim Hoke's supporting saxophone, while Griffin's bell like vocal is literally 'up front and in your face.' The foregoing apart, the thought occurs that the veiled undercurrent in Patty's lyric relates to, life as a journey. The point being it's not yet time for the aged passenger to undertake his last ride in the company of the grim reaper.

Replete with a 'fits like a glove' supporting vocal from her buddy Emmylou Harris, "Trapeze," based on a childhood recollection, finds Griffin engage with the acoustic face of her musical canon. Contemplating the possibility of multiple layers [of meaning], the 'mature in years' circus performer storyline apart – *"she took to the air with the greatest of ease"* - the lyric is a testament to the endurance of the human spirit when it come to stumbling, while in love or, over life's obstacles. The foregoing is perfectly encompassed in the extended version of the chorus *"Some people don't care if they live or they die, Some people want to know what it feels like to fly, They gather their courage and they give it a try, And fall under the wheels of time going by"* and the closing line will doubtless touch a 'personal' nerve with listeners. At the close of the track as her voice reaches a crescendo one can't help but wonder how such overwhelming volume, depth, and consummate vocal control, can come from this delicate, Piaf like figure. With barely a two second gap [following "Trapeze"] the sound of an aggressively strummed guitar introduces "Getting Ready" in which the sneering narrator relates to her current amour *"I'm getting ready to let you go."* Griffin, vocally, adopted a 'rock chick' approach on her sophomore effort **"Flaming Red"** and while the melodically boisterous "Getting Ready" raises that ancient spectre, these days her upbeat musings display far more control.

The opening line of "Burgundy Shoes" lyric mentions Bangor, Griffin was born and raised in Old Town, Maine. Based on a childhood bus ride with a beloved matriarchal figure - her mother? - *"You're the most pretty lady in the world"* - Patty casually, yet slyly drops in the multiple Beatle [lyric] reference *"Michelle ma belle a song that you loved then, You hold my hand and sing to yourself sun,"* and moves on to repeat the word "sun" ala the George Harrison composition "Here Comes The Sun." Embracing simple, yet spot on remembrances - *"We climb on our seats, the vinyl is cold"* - "Burgundy Shoes" equates to one of those golden goose bump raising moments that makes hanging around this old Earth worthwhile. While I could quite happily sit here all day pressing the button to repeat "Burgundy Shoes," we must

move on. All I can relate regarding “Heavenly Day” – and I trust my words won’t be misconstrued - is who knew that a white girl from Maine could sing gospel with such potency and sensitivity. For Patty maybe it was “Heavenly Day” when she wore her “Burgundy Shoes”?

You gather the ingredients, weigh and mix them and then bake the cake. Later comes the addition of a thin layer of marzipan, topped by a similar thickness of icing, and then the creator adds some, appropriate, final decoration. As with “Getting Ready,” “No Bad News” opens with an energetically strummed, metallic sounding, acoustic guitar, rat tat tat machine gun drumming eventually breaks cover and midway through the cut the addition of brass instruments amounts to a spirited final flourish. Like decorating a cake, or making a pie even, “No Bad News” just builds and builds to such a wonderful climax. Maine, another mode of transport, trains in this case, and the adoption of a male persona, are the foundations for the gentle “Railroad Wings” a contemplation on life and the passage of time. As the lyric attests we humans rarely share our innermost secrets, even with those closest to us – *“There’s things I’ll never tell you til the day I die, Things I done, I can never undo, hiding everything.”*

“Up To The Mountain [MLK Song]” is, musically, cut from the same cloth as “Heavenly Day.” Last year Solomon Burke included it on his album **“Nashville,”** and Patty’s backing vocals could be heard on the final result. MLK in the song title is, of course, none other than Dr. Martin Luther King [d. 1968]. In terms of Griffin’s highly personal/reflective lyric, the Mainer has taken as her foundation King’s *“I’ve been to the mountain top”* address delivered in Memphis on the day prior to his assassination. Toward the close, that address included the prophetic *“Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now.”* Featuring Ian McLagan’s piano, a John Mark Painter string arrangement [his string arrangements enhance a number of other cuts] and Patty’s soulful vocal, this song is surely destined to become an American Songbook standard. “I Don’t Ever Give Up” could be interpreted, simply, as a personal attribute. However, the determined narrator goes on to survey ‘this is how I see my life’ on a much broader canvas. Death isn’t a new topic for Griffin, as was evidenced by “Long Ride Home” on **“1000 Kisses,”** and “Someone Else’s Tomorrow” complements its predecessor rather than treading old ground. With *“We filed out of the churchyard so cold it was silver”* the narrator details, with total economy, her remembrance of that grey skied Sunday morning in winter. Similarly set at the close of [another] year, this album gently draws to a close with the thoughtful waltz paced “Crying Over.”

Back in the real world where commence and art clash like leviathans, you should be aware that three versions of **“Children Running Through”** have been released. There’s the standard twelve-track version, while Barnes & Noble are [for the minute?] retailing a version with two previously unreleased, bonus tracks - “Free” and “Up Or Down.” Finally, “Moon Song” is available as a bonus track when you download the entire album from iTunes. It’s a sad situation when, after the event, the poor fan discovers he/she didn’t score the cherry on the cake. And finally, I have no doubt that **“Children Running Through”** has assured Griffin a place in the categories of artist and album, in countless end of year polls.

Folkwax Score 10 out of 10

**Arthur Wood.**

Kerrville Kronikles 02/07.