



Rod Picott **"Girl From Arkansas"** Welding Rod Music

A Nashville based musician, Picott has set a cracking pace here at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Not many folk or country singer/songwriter's can match his output of three albums, chock full of quality songs, in as many years. His latest album opens with a portrait of a "Girl From Arkansas" whose upbringing is best described as *down at heel*.

Picott's principle stock in trade, *to date*, has been songs that feature blue-collar characters and "Wrecking Ball," co-written with Slaid Cleaves [*], is a stylish creation drawn from that mould. At the outset the narrator relates, *"Daddy swings a wreckin' ball, Through factories and crumblin' walls, He's proud of his construction company,"* but don't be fooled that this is a portrait of a clean living, upstanding pillar of the community, because - his son - the narrator goes on to reveal that Daddy's a fighting and drinking man, *"Every Friday blue lights, Bring him home."* In closing, the son, grown and with a wife and child of his own, now owns his father's company, contemplates the conundrum life has set him, *"At night I dream that I can run, Away from all that daddy left me."* There's a hint of Fred Eaglesmith's songwriting approach in the sound and lyrical construction of "Big Mean Men," a song that captures the hurt felt when love goes wrong - *"Swing that hammer baby, swing it again, That's what turns boys into big mean men,"* and, in a similar vein, "No Love In This Town," co-written with album co-producer David Henry, is a *"I see you everywhere, Now that you're not here with me"* tale of affection unrequited.

Short and pleasant string breaks are interspersed throughout the reflective ballad "That's Where My Baby Lives," as the broken hearted narrator paints a less than flattering picture of her unwholesome abode with, *"Bare light bulbs and coffee stains, Paper cups on tv trays, Cracked yellow paint and muddy prints."* Also ballad paced and, subjectively, a declaration of love, "Down To The Bone," unfolds to reveal some fascinating images. When I saw Picott perform locally a couple of months ago, he introduced "Gun Shy Dog" with the insight that the lyric was inspired by a *hunting* dog that was frightened by the sound of gunfire. As for "Kerosene," when Rod first moved to Nashville he lived in a property that had no heating system - so he purchased a stove. The song is an, at times, amusing recollection - *"it's in your clothes, it's in your hair, Prob'ly in your veins if you look in there"* - of his *once upon a time* sole source of Tennessee winter warmth, and features the spot on - *"You walk to town with a big red can, Walkin' back you keep switchin' hands."* It seems that when Picott received one of his first royalty cheques, he installed a more modern form of heating in his property.

The closing trio of tracks are inexorably connected. Fifty seconds long, the instrumental "Lullaby" features the sounds of a *sombre* organ, played by Alicia Bequette. It's the preface to "Gone" which opens with a reference to *"understanding"* how A. P. Carter must have felt *"When Sara took her voice away from his,"* a real life Carter Family occurrence circa 1943 [+]. Picott goes on to deliver further pictures of *things* that go away - including *"a steam train flyin' down the railroad track"* - although it is heartbreak and loss of love that really forms the core of the song, and the latter images merge seamlessly with the lyric of the appropriately titled, closing cut "The Last Goodbye," a song of parting, co-written with Alicia.

Subjectively there's a gentler, less gritty and abrasive aspect to some of the characters that appear in the **"Girl From Arkansas,"** although there's an undeniable emphasis upon heartbreak and unrequited love. That said, in my opinion, this collection marks another step forward for Rod. On this collection, he's

ably supported by Dave Jacques [John Prine, Patty Griffin] on bass, Paul Griffith [Buddy Miller, Mindy Smith] on drums, and co-producer/engineer David Henry on cello, bass, guitar and more.

“Girl From Arkansas” is currently available on the web from <http://www.echotunes.com>

Note.

[*] - Cleaves included the tune on his 1997 Rounder/Philo debut **“No Angel Knows.”**

[+] – A.P. and Sara separated in 1933, were divorced six years later, following which Sara married Coy Bays, and the original Carter Family ceased performing together in 1943.

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 11/04