



Will Taylor & Strings Attached “**Collaborations**” Heart Music

Will Taylor has spent much of his performing career playing viola, although as this recording proves, he is equally skilled on violin and guitar. Taylor’s background is in jazz and classical music, and his group Strings Attached, conceived in Austin, Texas during 1999, has been performing an annual concert series since 2001 – in association with a seemingly endless stream of singer/songwriters who make that town their home - in the sanctuary of a local church. Including Taylor, Strings Attached is currently an eight-piece aggregation that features viola, cello, violin, guitar, bass, piano, trumpet and drums/percussion.

“**Collaborations**” is the third release by String Attached, although it is only the second to feature recordings from the aforementioned church based concert series. The first “**Strings Attached, Vol. 1**” appeared in late 2003. In fact the twelve cuts on “**Collaborations**” are a mix of studio recordings, radio sessions and selections from “with Strings Attached” church concerts. In that regard a number of the tracks on “**Collaborations**” appeared on the previous pair of Strings Attached releases.

Musically speaking Taylor’s concept doesn’t reinvent the wheel, and anyone familiar with the music presented on, for instance, Judy Collins’ 1965 Elektra album “**In My Life**” or, say, The Beatles “Eleanor Rigby” [*] should be familiar with the approach. Austin based performer Alejandro Escovedo performed with a similar string based ensemble during the early nineteen-nineties. Where Taylor scores, is in melding his classical and jazz influences with each performer’s musical canon. The disc opens with “Easy Rider” Eliza Gilkyson’s tribute to her hit composer father, the late Terry Gilkyson. Like John Phillips “Creeque Alley,” Eliza’s song is a potted history of her father’s life and musical career and the song title refers to his group The Easy Riders. The use of Jason McKenzie’s tabla and hand drums adds a signature sound to many of the cuts here, including “Easy Rider,” and when combined with Steve Zirkel’s lone trumpet on the intro to, say, Jimmy LaFave “Never Is A Moment” an already poignant number becomes significantly more moving.

The *new cuts* here – from various sources - amount to a tender reading by Shawn Colvin of her Elly Brown [+] co-write “Set The Prairie On Fire” from the 1992 album “**Fat City**,” an intricate version of “Cinnamon” by Ian Moore recorded at KUT-FM, followed by “New Monkey King” which appeared on Austin based guitarist Guy Forsyth’s 1999 TMG release “**Can You Live Without.**” There’s a soulful cover of “Queen Of Tears” by Ruthie Foster and her percussionist Cyd Cassone, and the most recent church recording here is the smoky sounding, late night ballad “In This Life” performed by writer Libby Kirkpatrick – employing a delivery ala Bessie Smith, plus the aforementioned LaFave track.

Dating from previous String Attached releases, Patrice Pike’s “Volcanoes” opens with an extended and tasteful brass intro, the studio cut “My Name Is Truth” by Barbara K [ex-Timbuk 3] comes across as somewhat intense, then there’s the symphonic sounding Will Taylor composition “Tigris,” and from early days of Slaid Cleaves’ songbook the uplifting “For The Brave,” and finally, a studio version of Sara Hickman’s lullaby “It’s Alright” from her children’s album “**Newborn**” [1999]. It never registered with me before, but the melody to Hickman’s song is reminiscent of the traditional “10,000 Miles.”

“**Collaborations**” is a musically rich and varied compilation, spanning five years of work, and displays Taylor’s concept “Strings Attached” in a live and recording studio environment. It’s little wonder, therefore, that his annual “with Strings Attached” concert series has become a hot ticket in Austin. Darn,

I almost forgot, this CD also contains some two-bonus videos. In the first Shawn Colvin performs the old Talking Heads song "This Must Be The Place [Naïve Melody]" which she recorded on her "**Cover Girl**" [1994] album, and Eliza Gilkyson can be seen performing "Easy Rider" the song that opens "**Collaborations.**"

Note.

[*] – The Beatles recording featured 4 violins, 2 violas and 2 cellos.

[+] – Brown was the vocalist/songwriter in Grace Pool a great late nineteen-eighties band who cut two rather fine albums for Reprise.

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 08/05.