



Patty Larkin **"Red = Luck"** Vanguard Records

With the release of **"Red = Luck,"** eighteen years after her debut album, Larkin finally reaches double figures in terms of her recorded output. The title of collection is inspired by the Chinese belief that *red = luck*. While this album also marks Patty's third consecutive production collaboration with Bette Warner, Ben Wittman [Lucy Kaplansky, The Story, Jennifer Kimball] was also involved in overseeing **"Red = Luck."** Wittman was behind the drum kit for Patty's Y2K release, **"Regrooving The Dream."**

Patty Larkin the lyricist has never graced us with storytelling epics; rather, her lyrics have subjectively explored the human condition and our environment, sometimes from obtuse perspectives. Over her most recent handful of albums Larkin has consistently supported her words with backing tracks that can best be described as guitar n' percussion driven *sound landscapes*. "24/7/365" and "Louder" the upbeat, pseudo-Celtic closer [which occasionally mutates into a harmonica driven blues] are typical examples. The drum rhythms employed on the former cut sounds not unlike U2, while lyrically "24/7/365" is constructed around the popular 21<sup>st</sup> century calendar catchphrase.

The main sentiment expressed on this disc is that of loss, and in the opening cut "All That Innocence" from one viewpoint the narrator [naively?] appears to be waiting for someone or something to arrive. According to Larkin's liner note, it's the coming of summer. That said, the lines *"Heal up by the fire"* and *"Keep your head down low, Keep that ticket in your pocket"* also hint at someone being offered shelter. Reinforcing that possibility, apart from the mention of *"You're standing at the gates of hell"* – a great location to visit if you're contemplating losing some innocence, every verse and the chorus close with the line *"There's nowhere else to go."* That there is nowhere else to go, further suggests a person who has *terminally* burned their boats.....

In the chorus of "The Cranes" Larkin writes *"If you're thinking of leaving, You're leaving at a very bad time."* Inspiration came to Larkin while driving through Nebraska, to a gig, when she noticed the cranes heading north after wintering in the Gulf of Mexico. The twist in the lyric, hinges around Larkin's use of the opposites, *returning* and *leaving*. In "Italian Shoes," the *chic fashion* statements of wearing *"Italian shoes"* and *"having the hair of a star"* are considered as routes that the narrator could employ to communicate with her live-in lover, although she offers that they *"wouldn't mean a thing to me."* Heaven knows a solution is required, since it appears, currently, communication within their relationship is plainly not happening. Although the main character in "Birmingham" has a day job, the bottom line, Patty suggest, is that that person may barely be living above the poverty line. What's more, in these times of economic hardship *the poor* are no longer a shrinking minority, but an annually increasing *demographic*. The conclusion, *"Birmingham is, Just a place to be."*

"Home" and "Normal" are simple, ordinary, non-contentious titles, yet they equate, respectively, to the pair of songs that Larkin penned immediately in the wake of 9/11. Songwriters have reacted to that tragedy in numerous ways, and Patty has chosen to look inward to what she considers a safe place. Track wise the foregoing tracks are separated by "Different World," although Patty's liner notes offer no 9/11 connection for the song. Clocking in at seventy-three seconds, the album title track is a gently picked acoustic guitar instrumental that melodically intertwines for part of its duration with Larkin's ethereal sounding voice. "Inside Your Painting" presents, underpinned by a pronounced backbeat, a series of disparate fantasy images that include *"you're playing harmonica, I'm reading erotica."* Although Florida is not specifically mentioned in the love song, "St. Augustine" – on record as the oldest city in the States, the insight that *"Well they burned down the town in the name of a king"* recalls the occasion in 1586 when Sir Francis Drake's and his troops put the town to the torch.

As always you're never quite sure where Larkin is going to *subjectively* pop up next, and in that regard **"Red = Luck"** preserves the pattern.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood

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