



### Carrie Newcomer "**The Gathering Of Spirits**" Philo Records

This is the fourth consecutive occasion on which producer Mark Williams and Carrie Newcomer have collaborated on one of her studio albums, and this is their third co-production. Normally based out of Charlotte, North Carolina, across the four albums Williams and Newcomer have alternated between Mark's old base at the legendary Reflection Sound Studios in Charlotte, and Echo Park/Airtime Studios in Carrie's hometown of Bloomington, Indiana. This time around Bloomington got the vote.

When Newcomer undertook her debut UK tour in June 1997, she opened for Alison Krauss and Union Station. Krauss, a Rounder label mate, produced the latest Nickel Creek album "**This Side**" which included Carrie's "I Should've Known Better." On the title cut of "**The Gathering Of Spirits**" Krauss duets with Carrie on the chorus, and the song investigates the sacred aspect of friendship, which though parted by distance and time, rarely fades or dies. "*We'll take up where we left off*" being confirmation of many such gatherings of kindred spirits. In the scholarly world, one interpretation is that the legendary Fisher King was the keeper of the much sought after Holy Grail. In "The Fisher King" Newcomer refers to the legend, and appears to draw the conclusion that a lifelong search – *the journey* - often leads the seeker back to where they started.

Carrie's beloved father featured prominently in "My Father's Only Son," a song that touchingly captured their years as fishermen, and was the title track of her 1996 Philo album. Picture, if you will, in "I'll Go Too," a very young child petrified of the "*ugly things*" lurking under her bed. She is certain that they will surface when the dark comes, so she sneaks downstairs for comfort and reassurance. Taking her by the hand, Carrie's father leads her back to her bedroom while asserting his presence with the soothing words "*I'll go too.*" The same reassurance of "*I'll go too*" was there, later on, when Carrie learned to swim, prior to her wedding and at her mother's passing – the latter event was also captured with a daughter's love in the 1994 song "Three Women." In the closing verse Newcomer expresses a wish that when her final day arrives, that an angel will take her by the hand with the same soothing words, "*I'll go too.*"

As love songs go, the wryly worded "Silver" focuses upon that time *to come* [for all of us] when we are no longer the svelte examples of manhood and womanhood that we once were. By way of proving that Newcomer possesses mettle, "I'm Still Standing" is a sing it loud and proud song of resistance that climaxes with the declaration "*This is proof of a lesson taught, I am stronger than you thought.*" Available as an acoustic MP3 download on Carrie's web site for a time [late last year], "I Heard an Owl" is her 911 song. Her immediate sense of desperation and desolation at the turn of events is captured in the words, "*I stood naked and bewildered, By the evil people do.*" If "*Don't tell me hate is ever right or God's will*" is a truth, then "*the only peace this world will know, Can only come from love*" is Newcomer's honest and heartfelt conclusion.

Although titled "The Things I've Gone And Done," the closing track is actually a paean to "*the things I did not say or do, Just because I was afraid.*" Something we are all guilty of [privately]. A couple of verses later "*Every time I stop to gather stones, I straighten up an walk away*" is a reference to the old proverb and to the fact that the narrator has learned her lesson well. In the penultimate verse Carrie wonders how "*something good can get so twisted, That there's no semblance at all*" having in the previous lines referred to the teachings of Jesus as well as Mohammad.

Newcomer's philosophy for life hinges upon family, friends, home and the sometimes, stunning beauty of a simple life. Covering the vast panorama of life from the cradle to the grave, her songs on this collection are a consummate execution of that philosophy.

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood

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