



Various **"American Connection"** Corazong Records

The last few decades have witnessed the weekly appearance of compilation collections increase from a barely perceptible trickle to one of almost plague proportions. Well, it seems that way sometimes. Recordings that feature specially recorded or live material obviously possess far more attraction for the serious music collector, than albums featuring previously available tracks. Seventeen of the eighteen cuts on this Dutch Corazong release, are drawn from four years of *[mostly] acoustic studio sessions* recorded for the Dutch KRO Radio 2 Saturday evening show "American Connection" which first took to the airwaves back in the spring of 2001. All of the songs featured have appeared on existing recordings by the participants – mainly as studio versions. Frankly, these days "Americana" is something of tired nom de plume – A&M launched the [major label] recording careers of David Wilcox and Tish Hinojosa back in 1989 with a subsidiary label of that name. Commenting on the 2001 launch of the radio show the liner notes claim *"At the time the term Americana was relatively new for this wayward music with strong roots in the southern part of the United States"* – historically speaking, that's plain outdated clap trap - by a clear decade!

While all the participants perform music that can be [loosely] described as Americana, as we shall see, the performers are not all North American by birth or residence. **"American Connection"** opens with the Dylanesque tones of Dan Bern, c/w harness and harmonica, and his "Not For Sale" is a personal statement regarding what is and isn't for sale – *"his love"* being the non-commercial commodity. The Canadian contingent here includes Ron Sexsmith, Kathleen Edwards and Stephen Fearing. Sexsmith performs the plaintive yet politically slanted "For The Driver" – probably the best cut here, while relative newcomer Kathleen Edwards dips into her appropriately title debut album **"Faller"** and drones her way through "The Lone Wolf," and Stephen Fearing's "Song On the Radio" hails from the recordings of his side/and project, Blackie And The Rodeo Kings.

Lyrically inspired by America's adventure in Iraq, "Hiway 9" appeared on Eliza Gilkyson's Grammy nominated album **"Land Of Milk And Honey"** [2004]. On the cut, Eliza is accompanied by the slide guitar and voice of Jeff Plankenhorn. The Drunken Stuntmen, a septet, are based in the Pioneer Valley of West Massachusetts and "Out of Bed" is a run-of-the-mill electric number. Post his days with Jeff Tweedy as a member/main songwriter in Uncle Tupelo, Jay Farrar formed Son Volt who cut a trio of albums then Farrar put the combo on hold - they've just resurfaced with a retrospective and new recordings - and launched his own solo career. "Hard Is The Fall" is drawn from his sophomore solo effort **"Terroir Blues."** Beth Hart's delivery of "Hiding Under Water," supported mainly by a piano, bears comparison with Janis Joplin's gritty brand of blues. The Hackensaw Boys and Chris Knight explore the country face of Americana, respectively, with speed of light fiddles on "Sweet Petunia," while "Broke Plow" is a Dust Bowl remembrance ala Steinbeck. Vocally, Knight pulls off a pretty good Fred Eaglesmith impression on the latter cut.

The first of two non-American acts on this disc is, Ane Brun, a Norwegian who currently resides in Stockholm, Sweden. Her debut solo album **"Spending Time With Morgan"** was released at the end of May, 2003 in Scandinavia, and the monotonous cyclical strum-along "Humming One Of Your Songs" is taken from that release. Better known abroad than at home, New Yorker Eugene Ruffolo performs "One More Mystery" and Massachusetts born and bred songwriter Boris McCutcheon warbles his "Gift Horse." Josh Ritter's contribution is a laid back reading of the lively "Kathleen" one of the standout cuts on his third solo album **"Hello Starling."**

The Hague, Holland based trio [Hugo] Remmelt, [Thijs] Muus & Femke [Japing] consist of two guys, Remmelt and Muus and one girl, Femke. Featuring acoustic guitars and their voices, this trio's "If We Should Fall" possesses the feel of a CSN cut from their 1969 debut recording – so what does the latter say vocally about that venerable American/British all male trio? Former Austin, Texas lawyer, award winning poet, and singer/songwriter Jeff Talmadge is now based out of Atlanta, Georgia, and "Photograph" is taken from "**Grace, Gravity And The Moon**" [2003] his fourth of, to date, five solo recordings. As for Freedy Johnston's "The Mortician's Daughter" it turns out to be about as exciting as the title sounds.

Closing this disc is a live reading of "Waiting Around To Die" from Townes Van Zandt's 1968 debut album "**For The Sake Of The Song.**" Of course Townes was already sat on a barstool beside Janis and Jimi years before "**American Connection**" was even a radio show concept. Corazong what the hell's the point of including this "bonus cut" when a handful studio and live versions already existed in the public domain at the time of his 1997 passing? He may be one of the *godfather's of Americana*, but he's also far from being the only one. The exploitation of his catalogue, studio and live, in the last eight years has been nothing less than shameful, and the inclusion of this live Townes cut is another sad example.

Folkwax Score 5 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

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