



## Dar Williams – EMERALD (Album Review) Bread And Butter Records

*Emerald, a green gem, and now a sparkling Dar Williams song collection.*

Williams journeyed, far and wide, across her native land in creating the eleven song, self-produced Emerald, her ninth disc to feature original material (\*). The contributing musicians are best described as legion, literally, varying on each selection. Too numerous to list, song-by-song I'll allude to the principle players. In addition Dar is no stranger to co-writing; one established collaborator and a trio of newcomers contribute here, while the inclusion of a couple of cover tunes on Emerald finds Williams indulge in another back catalogue trademark. Following a two-decade sojourn on the NYC based imprint Razor & Tie Records, Stateside this album is self-released, while in the UK, Emerald marks her debut on the home-bred Bread And Butter imprint.

Inspired by a friend who had separated from his spouse, a somewhat sombre scenario, the optimistic "Something To Get Through" launches this disc. According to Dar's web site she *"wrote the whole thing as if I were sitting next to him on a park bench."* Propelled by a pounding backbeat, "FM Radio" was co-written with Jill Sobule who shares the lead vocal. Their humorous and historically spot-on lyric, a 1970's musical pastiche, mentions Sonny & Cher (parting ways), Lou Reed, Jackson Browne, Springsteen and the now defunct, pioneering music publication Crawdaddy. There's even sly mention of that decades old, teen-girl rite - singing into your hairbrush. The title "Empty Plane" conjures up a number of possible scenarios which Williams dutifully explores. Ostensibly a road song, it reflects upon the sweet sorrow of parting, flight and dreams - real and illusory. Richard Thompson (guitar) and Stance Mason (bass) support Dar's vocal on the *'stream of consciousness'* album title song. Headed to a gig in Bend, in a car driven by Loudon Wainwright III, awed by the sight of Oregon's *"beautiful and nostalgic"* Columbia River, Williams penned "Emerald." With the focus firmly on marriage "Slippery Slope" is the first Dar Williams/Jim Lauderdale co-write to appear in the public domain, wherein the male protagonist (Lauderdale) admits to being a klutz - *"I'm a horses ass in a dancing class."*

According to Dar *"I wrote 'Girl Of The World' for the girls at Our Little Roses home and school in Honduras."* Founded in 1988 it's the only facility in that Central American republic to care for young females whether orphaned, abused or living in extreme poverty. The (yet to be released) documentary Las Chavas will feature music composed by Williams; during December 2012, director Brad Coley began filming Las Chavas at Our Little Roses. Co-written with another Nashville based writer - Angel Snow – the urgent country/pop concoction "Here Tonight," which precedes "Girl Of The World," will also feature in the Coley documentary. Kenneth Pattengale and Joey Ryan, aka The Milk Carton Kids, add their voices to "Mad River" a 21<sup>st</sup> century portrait of the maelstrom negotiated by teens in entering adulthood.

Penned by Canadian musician Kat Goldman "Weight Of The World" debuted on her 2007 album Sing Your Song. Williams is supported vocally on this heartfelt paean by Suzzy Roche and

daughter Lucy Wainwright Roche. Five-piece Philadelphia rock band The Hooters accompany Williams on “Johnny Appleseed.” Composed by Joe Strummer and his post-Clash band, The Mescaleros, its presence here is part homage, part environmental message. At middle-school summer camps, Dar, a time-served volunteer, encourages kids to plant bee-friendly gardens. Co-written with NYC based pianist/keyboardist, sometime touring companion and long-established collaborator Bryn Roberts, the five-minute plus closing selection “New York Is A Harbor” solely features the pair. Emotionally intense, melodically addictive, (in my opinion) it’s the best song Dar has written in years. Replete with allusions to “*a stature raised her light,*” dreamers who “*work with calloused hands*” and the spirit who “*lives on the island,*” it explores the city’s role as haven, a place where industriousness occasions successes great and small.

A significant portion of Emerald brings to mind Dar’s classic early career sets The Honesty Room and Mortal City. Spanning the musical changes from ethereal to energetic, Emerald is a musically engaging, environmentally ‘green’ delight.

**Note.**

(\*) Discounting, that is, the early cassette only releases I Have No History and All My Heroes Are Dead.

<http://www.darwilliams.com/> and <https://myspace.com/darwilliams>

***Brought to you from the desk of the Folk Villager.***

aka Arthur Wood.

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