



Burns Sisters Band **"Wild Bouquet"** Ithaca Records

Eliza Gilkyson's lyrics definitely took on a socio-political bent following her participation in the [still rolling] Woody Guthrie tribute/road-show **"Ribbon Of Highway, Endless Skyway"** – clearly evidenced, for instance, by her razor-edged, 'take no prisoners' and 'call a spade a spade' "Hiway 9" on **"Land Of Milk And Honey"** [2004]. Two years farther down the road [excuse the pun] Gilkyson's words now magnify the magnitude of the mistake. The Burns Sisters have taken part in the Guthrie show in recent years, and I doubt if I'm very wide of mark when I say that the 'slam dunk' opening trio of songs on **"Wild Bouquet"** appear as a direct result of their involvement with Messrs. LaFave, Childers & Co. That said it's pertinent to add that their late father, John, was at one time a heavy-hitting senior Democrat [and Robert Kennedy's NY state Presidential race campaign manager]. As for LaFave the Burns sisters have, for many years, enjoyed a close friendship with the Red Dirt Texan, and each has contributed in the past to the other's albums.....

OK, back to that opening trio of songs. Sequentially Leonard Cohen's unadorned statement of intent "Democracy" leads, and it's followed by the *"come one, come all"* posthumous Woody Guthrie/Ellis Paul co-write "God's Promise" and finally Woody's own "Vigilante Man." Towards the close of this collection there's a second three-part 'slam dunk' led by [Little] Stevie Van Zandt's "I Am A Patriot." – the girls previously included this number on their 1995 Rounder/Philo debut **"Close to Home"** – and it's followed by their arrangement of the traditional "Johnny We Hardly Knew Ya" – a veiled reference to America's pressing need for another John F. Kennedy? or simply a comment on current conflicts? – and is topped off by Marie Burns' "Bring Them Home." The latter track features the voices [and opinions] of personnel who have recently served their country, while woven into Marie's lyric are references to America's post 9/11 calamities – Afghanistan, Iraq and New Orleans – and it has [already] been nominated by Folk Alliance for their Song of the Year Award. I use the word 'already,' because **"Wild Bouquet"** was only released during mid-October 2006. You know, just in time for that 'recent election.'

The mid-section of the album features material penned by Marie, Jeannie and Annie Burns, some in collaboration with others, plus a few cover songs. Tracy Grammer's current performing partner, Jim Henry, assisted Jeannie to write "Ella" - wherein a mother [Jeannie] addresses her baby daughter. Henry was the Burns girls lead guitarist, for a spell, a few years back. Later, Marie delivers an impassioned lead vocal on Ann Peebles' 1973 # 6 R&B Chart entry "I Can't Stand The Rain" [titled "Can't Stand The Rain" here]. Peebles co-wrote the song with her [then future] husband Don Bryant and disc jockey Bernard Miller. Later, the tune was successfully covered by Eruption [# 5 in U.K. and # 18 in U.S.A. during 1978] and by Tina Turner. Considering her participation in Mac Benford's band The Woodshed, it's hardly surprising that Marie's "Wild Flower Honey" and "The Time Of Day" melodically possesses a country flavour, the former being rhythmically upbeat, the latter waltz paced. Like Marie, Annie also contributes three songs. Love has now withered for the narrator in the Peter Trutman co-write "To Live Again," while Annie teamed up with Radney Foster's 1980's musical partner, Bill Lloyd, for the similarly themed "Never Loved At All." Great guitar licks apart "Nowhere To Fall" finds Annie subtly address a number of society's present day ills.

Marie's debut solo album **"Free Little Bird"** [2000] opened with Childers' upbeat "Dance With The Gypsies," and here she takes the lead vocal on the waltz paced Bob Childers/Brad Piccalo composition "Blue Diamond," which just happens – surprise, surprise - to feature a backing vocal by Jimmy LaFave. "Pie Jesu," the closing cut on **"Wild Bouquet,"** first appeared on the Andrew Lloyd Webber penned collection **"Requiem."** Performed as a duet by Sarah Brightman, Webber's wife at the time, and twelve-year-old Paul Miles-Kingston, "Pie Jesu" scored the pair a 1985 U.K. Top 5 single, while Webber's work won the 1985 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition. Here, "Pie Jesu" draws this

thought provoking, inward and outward looking, song collection to a gentle close. Following a six-year recording hiatus, it's great to have another vocal harmony rich Burns Sister's album on the shelf side-by-side with their previous efforts.

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

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