



Tift Merritt **"Live From Austin, Texas"** New West Records

With only two solo albums to her name, Houston, Texas born and Raleigh, North Carolina bred thirty something Merritt's opportunity to appear on Austin City Limits arrived on 20th October 2005. Around half of Tift's almost one-hour long performance was broadcast the following January, in a show split with friend and fellow North Carolina musician Ryan Adams. Merritt is supported throughout her set by her four-piece band composed of Danny Eisenberg [keyboards, vocals], Jay Brown [bass, vocals], Zeke Hutchins [drums] and Brad Rice [guitar, vocals].

Houston is mentioned in the opening verse of "Stray Paper," the song that launched her George Drakoulis [*] produced sophomore outing **"Tambourine"** [2004] and kicks off her ACL debut. In terms of Tift's ten-song performance there's half a dozen tunes from the aforementioned **"Tambourine"** and a quartet from her Ethan Johns helmed debut **"Bramble Rose"** [2002]. By the close of the second number "Virginia, No One Can Warn You," taken from the latter album, it's pretty obvious considering his extended solos and 'power chord style' that Rice is to Merritt, what Michael Campbell is to Tom Petty. Guitars are also something of a fashion accessory for the pair – two songs performed, two guitars each. By the time Tift joins Danny at the keyboards for a soulful reading of "Ain't Looking Closely," Brad is ready to chop some chords with his third axe! Midway through the number there's an extended instrumental trade off between Eisenberg and Rice.

Band introductions over, supported by a Jay Brown backing vocal, Tift delivers a heartrending rendition of the bittersweet country style ballad "Still Pretending." Prior to launching into "Supposed To Make You Happy" – the 'hook' lies in the repetition of the song title - Tift introduces guitar technician Chris [Bynum]. Replete with harmonica rig and the hollowed bodied acoustic guitar Bynum just handed her, she's joined, vocally, by Brown on "Supposed To Make You Happy," and sans the rig follows with "Good Hearted Man." Where **"Bramble Rose"** possessed a definite country edge, the stylistic emphasis on **"Tambourine"** was Muscle Shoals and Memphis, with a soupcon of Nashville. Rice's chunky power chords imbue "Neighbourhood" with a Rolling Stones vibe, and armed with a tambourine Tift and crew then tear into a wayward and rowdy reading of "I Am Your Tambourine."

On 4th June 2005 Tift recorded her performance at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, and later that year self-released the nine-song CD **"Home Is Loud."** That disc closed with "Shadow In The Way" plus the gospel tinged "When I Cross Over," respectively, the closing cuts on **"Tambourine"** and **"Bramble Rose."** On the Austin City Limits stage, Tift closed with the same segue. The duration of each ACL rendition is in excess of nine minutes, and Tift c/w tambourine paces up and down the ACL stage during a wild and energetic reading of "Shadow In The Way." She switches to acoustic guitar and harmonica rig for the 'more sedate' encore number "When I Cross Over."

Offered reincarnation I'd pick the position of being Tift Merritt's guitar strap or maybe one of her guitars.....watch this DVD and you'll soon figure out why.

Note.

[*] – The recording sessions took place in Los Angeles, and the session players included solo artist Neil Casal, Don Heffington [Lone Justice, Hot Band], Gary Louris [Jayhawks], Maria McKee [Lone Justice, solo] and some guitar guy called Campbell. Mike Campbell.

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 11/07.