



Drive By Truckers "**A Blessing And A Curse**" New West Records

It all begins with Brad Morgan thrashing at his skins with pieces of wood. Within ten seconds he's joined by the triple guitar attack of Patterson Hood, Mike Cooley and Jason Isbell. The Athens, Georgia based Drive by Truckers, a quintet, launch their seventh album with Hood's composition "Feb 14" a ditty based on the hard luck premise "*Well, I guess we were in love once upon a time. I hope you're doing fine these days.*" Apart from the aforementioned trio's axe skills, individually, they also appear to possess an aptitude for stringing words together and setting them to music...well noise really. On "**A Blessing And A Curse**," Cooley pitches in with "Gravity's Gone" and "Space City." In the latter cut a recently bereaved person tries to make sense of his life following the loss of a much-loved partner. There's also a pair of songs from Isbell, namely, the raucous "Easy On Yourself" and the anthem like "Daylight."

Hood is by far the biggest contributor with six credits on this eleven-track collection. "Aftermath USA," a portrait of the seedy underbelly of life – full of drugs and personal dereliction - is credited to the Drive By Truckers with David Barbe. For Barbe, one-time bassist in Bob Mould's band Sugar, "**A Blessing And A Curse**" is the fourth consecutive occasion on which he has fulfilled the role of DBT album producer/co-producer. His first effort was "**Southern Rock Opera**" [2001], a "loosely based" double disc tribute to nineteen-seventies band Lynyrd Skynyrd and, for that matter, the whole southern rock/boogie phenomenon. You see the Drive By Truckers are a 21st century roots rock band, and if you believed the hype, the finest combo to plug in on planet Earth.

The lyric to the melodically laid back "Goodbye" appears to be Hood's personal reflection on loss of friends as well as family, irrespective of whether he has known them for decades or a few days. Sustained by full tilt guitar slash and thrash on "Wednesday" Patterson spins a tale about a desperate man "*They say every man's house should be his palace, But his castle stank of cat shit and alone*" who [imagines that he] has lost the love of a good woman and is left "*all alone to face the end.*" Easing up on the volume level and rhythmic pace, in "Little Bonnie," the narrator recalls a child, a relative, who died before reaching the age of four. The child, it appears, remains a poignant presence in the life of the family. Vocally Hood sounds like Neil Young on the refrain to the closing song "A World Of Hurt." The song is basically a treatise concerning suicide and how it is not a solution [or even an option], while the choice to live may involve treading a rocky road while continuing to search for true love.....and how, when you find it, it will almost inevitably be leavened by another measure of heartache.

If you desire roots rock bands that delight in painting ear drum poppin' sonic landscapes with loud electric guitars while supported by a driving drumbeat, and featuring obtuse subjectively dark lyrics, then the Truckers will undoubtedly satisfy your aural appetite. Just like a humungous platter of chicken fried steak swamped in white gravy.....what appears to be a belly-busting blessing can also be a cholesterol fuelled curse.

Folkwax Score 6 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 03/06.