



The Gourds "**Cow Fish Fowl Or Pig**" Sugar Hill Records

According to the liner this Sugar Hill release has been leased from Munich Records BV, The Netherlands. The Gourds are an Austin, Texas based five piece, while Sugar Hill Records Inc., HQ is in Durham, North Carolina. What a curiously convoluted *business world* we live in.....

The Gourds latest release, their sixth [if you count the 2001 *revamped version* of "**Shinebox**" as an album], opens with the Jimmy Smith composition "My Name is Jorge." Jorge, it appears, is a fruit grower and seller, and in the sixth verse he regales us with the revelation, "*And I won't sell no cow, fish, fowl or pig,*" or, for that matter, flowers. Sound wise, for the Gourds, the cut is acoustic and extremely restrained, apart from stickman, Keith Langford, who can be heard wailing away on a harmonica. It seems that Jorge once sold an apple to William S. "Naked Lunch" Burroughs, a lemon to Henry S. Ford, a plum to an unidentified pie maker, sugar cane to (Lee) Harvey Oswald and a pear to Muhammad Ali – and when he called the latter character Clay, Jorge got "*punched out.*" As for the lines, "*But I'll sell a bucket of peaches to Prine, 'Cept he's got his own trees so he ain't shakin' mine.*" Now I wonder if that is *our John*, since apart from once recording an album titled "**Bruised Orange**" [1978], in "Spanish Pipedream" taken from his 1971 self-titled debut album, Prine dared to rhyme "*peaches*" with "*Jesus.*" The Gourds – or at least the band's writers Jimmy Smith, Kevin Russell and Max Johnston, dare to rhyme pretty well anything.

The addition of Max Johnston's fiddle/mandolin/guitar on all of the band's recordings since "**Ghosts Of Hallelujah**" [1999], has made the sound of what was a red hot, good-time quartet even more rounded. In fact where Smith and Kevin Russell were the main songwriters in the four-piece incarnation of The Gourds, Johnson's arrival added another *writing string* to their collective bow. In addition, the lyrics of Johnston's compositions are a little more straightforward than those emanating from the individual pens of Messrs. Smith and Russell.

The seventeen tracks on "**Cow Fish Fowl Or Pig**" run out at over sixty-minutes duration and are distributed equally around the Intermission/Cut # 9, titled "Short Guy Spiritual Rap (Short Guy From "Chi-Town")." Some 160 seconds in length, according to the liner this *field recording* was made in Little Rock, Arkansas outside Juanita's Cantina, during the Spring of 1999. The lyric, not reproduced in the liner, involves the spiritual redemption of the Short Guy, as in "*I started off serving the mob, here I am in the house of the Lord serving God.*"

Russell's first cut on this collection, "Roll & Tumble," recalls the credits of his recent solo album with the line "*Life is a junker.*" As ever, there's a good time feel to the music throughout this disc, while, lyrically, I'd keep the album out of the earshot of your sensitive and ageing maiden aunt. Particularly on Kevin's "Foggy Blossoms," subtitled "Mechanical Bride," while his "Ants On The Melon" contains the invocation "*I want to see you naked, baby, See yer titties sittin' up high.*" Born in 1913, Virginia Hamilton Adair, has written poetry for most of her life. At the age of eighty-three, she published her first collection, "*Ants on the Melon,*" a fact that The Gourds credit in the album liner. Max and Michelle Shocked's father, Dollar Bill Johnson, plays guitar and is the lead voice on the closing, [what appears to be an] eight-minute long easy going cut, "Smoke Bend," a song that he penned. *Everything comes to those that wait.....*

In fact Dollar Bill's tune only lasts for around three and a half minutes and following nearly thirty seconds of silence, there's a four-minute a capella cut, wherein one by one the band members deliver some of the craziest lines that The Gourds have ever committed to a track – it has to be heard, to be believed. Whacky as ever..... Ladies and gentlemen, The Gourds.

Folkwax Rating 6 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 12/02