

JENNIFER WARNES

THE WELL Revisited – An Alto Earth Angel Sings

THE WELL was first released in the States by the Music Force label on Tuesday September 4, 2001. I clearly recall purchasing a copy at Waterloo Records in Austin, Texas on that date. It proved to be a blessing. Due back in the UK on September 14, I was finally able to fly home around September 20. Jennifer Warnes' voice and the songs—particularly her composition *Prairie Lullaby*, which still reduces me to a joyous, quivering mess of goose bumps—helped me traverse each post 9/11 day. Segue forward nine years an enhanced 24K Gold edition of THE WELL has been issued by Impex Records. More about this remastered version later, first let me paint the backdrop that led to the making of THE WELL, historically and, for that matter, geographically.

Warnes was born in Washington State but was raised and still resides in California. As for her spirit, for the past three decades and then some, part of it has dwelt in Austin and the surrounding Hill Country. THE WELL in the album title—the artesian Jacob's Well, to be precise—is located on the north-west edge of Wimberley a popular Hill Country hideaway. Thought to be the longest underwater cave in Texas, it's also the primary source of water that flows in Cypress Creek. A place of seemingly peaceful beauty, numerous scuba divers have perished while exploring this underwater cavern. Through the opening decade of the new millennium countless musicians have relocated to Wimberley—Kevin Welch, Eliza Gilkyson, Billy Crockett, Sarah Jarosz the list simply goes on and on. That said, Doyle Bramhall Snr., a Dallas bred Texan, and pivotal participant in THE WELL, relocated there soon after his friend/collaborator Stevie Ray Vaughan passed away in late August 1990. While all of the foregoing is true, Jennifer's Central Texas connection dates from a decade earlier.

Following the release of Leonard Cohen's sixth studio album, RECENT SONGS, on the subsequent 1979 international tour the Canadian musician was accompanied by Austin, Texas jazz band Passenger. The five-member band had contributed to the album sessions, the players being Steve Meador (drums), Charles Roscoe Beck (bass), Mitch Watkins (guitar), Bill Ginn (keyboards) and Paul Ostermayer (saxophone, flute). Cohen's backup singers were Sharon Robinson and Jennifer Warnes, the

latter having first toured with the poet, novelist and musician during 1972. Toward the close of the 1970s Arista Records, an imprint for whom Warnes had recorded two studio albums, had taken out a court injunction preventing her from recording as a solo artist till their contract expired. So, Jenny joined Lenny on the tour bus. Warnes and Beck became a couple, and during her first stint residing in Austin (1979-1981) the Californian was introduced to many things Texan including performances by the then nascent talent Stevie Ray Vaughan. She became a fan. Jennifer has resided in Austin on a number of subsequent occasions. Her legendary tribute to the Leonard Cohen songbook FAMOUS BLUE RAINCOAT, which she co-produced with Beck, was released by Cypress Records during 1986 and opened with *First We Take Manhattan* on which Vaughan, memorably, contributed lead guitar.

Signing next with Private Music, Jennifer co-produced THE HUNTER (1992) with Beck and Elliot Scheiner. Co-written by Warnes, Ginn and Austinite John Fannin, the *True Emotion* lyric memorialised Vaughan. Although Jennifer and Roscoe eventually went their separate ways, Texas wasn't done with her, or she with it—not by a long stretch! Doyle Bramhall's Spring 1994 debut solo release BIRD NEST ON THE GROUND included his composition *Too Sorry*, on which he was supported by Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble. The rendition, probably recorded a decade earlier, proved that ghosts live on in the music. Enamoured, and initially concluding that *Too Sorry* was some previously unheard Vaughan recording, Warnes soon discovered otherwise. During the early 1970s Vaughan and Bramhall had been members of Marc Benno's band the Nightcrawlers. When the younger Stevie Ray eventually found fame as a solo artist, during the late 1980s the former band mates became co-writers. Although she'd never met Bramhall, Warnes knew his name from long ago conversations with Texan musical acquaintances.

Soon after the release of BIRD NEST ON THE GROUND Doyle was booked to play Jack's Sugar Shack in Los Angeles. Jennifer was there—both nights. Meeting backstage, revealing that he loved her performance of *It Goes Like It Goes*, the Oscar winning Norma Rae (1979) movie theme, a connection was made. On her first day in Wimberley, Bramhall took

Warnes to Jacob's Well. When Jennifer subsequently suggested to Private Music that she record an album informed by Texas blues they instantly nixed the idea. Undaunted, Warnes self-financed demos featuring Lone Star musicians, but the project only took off, years later, after she was approached by award winning composer Martin Davich.

Evaluating her affection for Texas, Jennifer told KGSR's Jody Denberg following the 2001 release of THE WELL: 'My great-granddad came through and was married in Texas and then they went on to Phoenix. So there's some familial history here.' Co-produced by Davich and Warnes, the original and revised versions of THE WELL open with the spiritually inspired title song. Co-written by Warnes and Bramhall, Doyle Bramhall II (Arc Angels, the Fabulous Thunderbirds) plays acoustic lead guitar on the song. Commenting on Jacob's Well, Jennifer told Jody: 'It's both scary and powerful and beautiful. And it's a power spot. It's like Ayres Rock.'

As an entity THE WELL is a magnificent musical web partly woven in Texas and California. Three songs have been added to the 2010 Impex edition. *La Luna Brilla* penned by Bramhall Snr. and Alfred Guzman (it translates as *The Moon Shines*) and Jesse Winchester's *Fool For The Look (In Your Eyes)*, have been inserted within the body of the original album and they fit seamlessly. *The Well (Reprise)* previously closed the album, but that honour now falls to the Jennifer Warnes/Bill Medley performance of *Show Me The Light* from the soundtrack to the children's cartoon Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer the Movie (1998).

In its original configuration, as composer Warnes' name was appended to only four songs and that remains the case on this fourteen song revision. Apart from song titles already mentioned/praised, the latter include Jennifer's contemporary Celtic update of the trad. *Too Late Love Comes*, Billy Joel's wistful paean to love *And So It Goes*, and *The Panther*. Penned by Warnes/Bramhall the latter lyric offers praise to this powerful spirit guide among America's ancient peoples. Interpreted as a blues, Doyle and Jennifer duet beautifully on the Eddy Arnold/Cindy Walker standard *You Don't Know Me*, and on the rallying call, *Patriot's Dream*, she's joined vocally by composer Arlo Guthrie. THE WELL was and remains a five-star collection of inspired songs and performances. **Arthur Wood**