



Various Artists **"Born Into The Whisper"** Waterbug Records

This twenty-track compilation would be a bargain even as a full price release, such is the sterling quality of its contents. Stateside you can purchase **"Born Into The Whisper"** from Waterbug Records for a mere \$5.00 including shipping and handling [*]. Purchase just one or more full price CD from the Waterbug catalogue [www.waterbug.com] and they'll throw in a copy of **"Born..."** for nothing, nix, nada. Bargain of the year? Oooooooh yes!

In **"Born Into The Whisper"** aka Waterbug Anthology # 8 label founder Andrew Calhoun has constructed another superb acoustic music smorgasbord, a veritable folk festival on disc. Hey Andrew, if you can come up with fare this good on CD, maybe you should be organising an annual Waterbug Songwriters Festival? Whether they are Waterbug label recording artists or not, at www.waterbug.com you can purchase recordings by, pretty well, all the artists featured here. It has historically become the norm that Calhoun's samplers feature a few previously unreleased tracks, and on # 8 Andrew has not stinted. # 8 features eight such cuts.

"Song Of The Magi," one of that magnificent eight, launches **"Born Into The Whisper."** Therein, writer Anais Mitchell takes the listener on a journey through the streets of Bethlehem, during Christmas time 0 A.D. and in modern times. Now I don't know whether Anais has stood in Bethlehem Square – I did about ten years ago, when it was relatively easy to do – and in the *modern* segment of "Song Of The Magi" this Vermont performer perfectly reflects the palpable unease I [and my fellow travellers] felt regarding the military presence on that warm summer afternoon. South Dakota bred Waterbug artist Rachel Ries, who appears later in this collection, adds a harmony vocal to Mitchell's cut. A trio of traditional numbers appear on # 8, and in chronological order the first is Kate MacLeod And The Pancakes rendition of "Handsome Molly." Later "I Live Not Where I Love" is delivered by the crystal clear voice of Austin based Karen Mal and finally there's a sprightly rendition of "Fennario" from Sylvia Herold & Euphonia. I reviewed Herold's album **"Lovely Nancy"** a few months back.

Another of this album's neat segues – a three way one - begins with Virginia based songwriter Paul Curreri's poetic "Hawkmoth," and is followed by the darkly hypnotic "Plea For A Good Night's Rest" penned by his wife, Devon Sproule. For a time Danny Schmidt was a Charlottesville, Virginia based musician but he's back home in Austin, Texas these days, and figuratively speaking his "This Too Shall Pass" concludes that "rocks will not always litter life's path." Andrew Calhoun released an album titled **"Shadow Of A Wing"** back in 2004, and # 8 features the previously unreleased song of that name. Mark Dvorak's Tex-Mex flavoured ballad "My Rose Of Jericho" finds a father expressing concern for the welfare of his wayward and estranged daughter.

Rachel Ries performs her early career road/love song "Mercy," while the single non-American on # 8 - Welshman, Jack Harris – performs his glorious pastoral word painting "Girl With A Hayrake." Currently studying English at Oxford University, Harris will deliver his debut album later this year. For the time being, two highly recommended EP's are available from Jack's web site <http://www.jackharrismusic.com/Music.html> Based on the west coast, Jamie Byrd gives us the motivational "Gonna Build Me A Barn," while pastoral America surfaces in "Farm In New Hampshire," a Robert Blake composition, performed by Virginia based songwriter Louis Ledford. Louis, Robert, Rachel and Anais occasionally work as the quartet, Tin Pan Caravan. Annie Gallup's "1917" traces the initial

New York days of an emigrant Irishman and later focuses on the actions of a depression era penny wise, pound-foolish person. Michael McNevin's "Margaret, 1956" recalls the day, half a century ago, when his star-struck mother took a trip to Hollywood. In the seafaring "Fishboat" Michael Troy references his hometown of Fall River, Massachusetts and in the lyric he writes from personal experience having once earned his living from the sea.

Back on August 29th late year when Katrina's storm surges breached her adopted hometown levees Gina Forsyth was touring in Denmark. Her previously unreleased and sassy "Talking Hurricane Refugee Blues" draws on Forsyth's [displaced person] cross-country travels post the hurricane. "Breathless," listed on the liner as an out-take from Jonathan Byrd's forthcoming album "**Learn To Rock & Roll,**" is another of this North Carolina based writer's barbed comments regarding capitalism and its evil soul brother corruption. The unreleased "I've Been Feelin' Better" amounts to a matter-of-fact personal assessment by Michael Jerling, while Lui Collins brings the album to a close with the natural world hymn "Blessed."

Over the past five years, in Folkwax, I've reviewed albums by well over half the artists featured on "**Born Into The Whisper.**" In order of appearance, Anais Mitchell [2003], Jack Harris [2005], Annie Gallup [2002], Michael McNevin [1992], Jonathan Byrd [2003], Michael Jerling [1993] are all past winners of the Kerrville New Folk Songwriting Contest. Gallup and McNevin have also competed successfully at the equivalent Telluride contest. Kerrville contest finalists here include Karen Mal [three times] and Michael Troy. In 2004 Michael was at least an audience winner, and while ill health robbed him of a main-stage appearance during 2005, the latter omission will be remedied this year. "**Born Into The Whisper.**"

Note.

[*] - Additional postage will be incurred for destinations outside North America.

Folkwax Score 10 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 03/06 & 04/06.