



ByrdJones **“Radio Soul”** no label

At this year’s Kerrville Folk Festival the duo ByrdJones – Jonathan Byrd and Diana Jones – played the opening half of one of the midweek, two-hour long Sundown Concerts and in mentioning their eleven song debut recording **“Radio Soul,”** Diana Jones, who produced the album, described it as a *“drive-by”* effort. It appears that the album was recorded in a single day, the venue being The Nashville Record Barn. As for their sound on CD that amounts to a pair of voices – Jones being somewhat throaty, balanced by Byrd’s mellifluous tenor – supported by their acoustic guitars, plus Jonathan’s mandolin.

The album opens with the title track, being the only Byrd and Jones co-write in the collection. As *“Radio Soul”* unfolds the [female?] narrator laments how her offspring has ‘traded in’ religious for secular music, *“Your radio soul has torn you away from your home on the hillside, it has caused you to stray from the church in the meadow, and the songs we have sung. You’ve tuned into the devil on the airwaves you’ve run with your radio soul.”* From here on in, apart from the A. P. Carter cover *“Blue Eyes”* – it’s the penultimate track - the remaining songs were individually penned by the participants. Sung a cappella [by both] at the outset, Byrd proceeds to take the lead on his melodically urgent *“Poor Boy,”* wherein the narrator recalls many sources of inspiration as a vocalist – *“a mountain murder ballad sung in four part harmony,” “the ring of the hammer on the long iron rail”* and more. In *“Maryville”* an itinerant fruit picker expresses a wish to return home, then adds *“But I never will.”* Penned by Jones, on *“Maryville,”* the pair duet on the chorus and individually take the lead on parts of each verse. Byrd picks some neat lead guitar on the latter cut and again on his ensuing *“The Things Of This World.”* Accepting that death is near, in the closing verse of *“The Things Of This World”* the narrator contemplates the future with a question *“What will we see, when at last we look upon his face?”*

Acts that the narrator ‘may have committed’ last night while under the influence of that ‘devil alcohol’ are voiced in Byrd’s *“Reckon I Did,”* while, next up, accompanied by Byrd, vocally and on mandolin, Jones revisits the title cut of her 2006 comeback album **“My Remembrance Of You.”** As death approaches in *“The Other Side”* Jones’ narrator looks forward to being on *“the golden shores of eternity”* reunited once again with the *“darling who waits there for me.”* The latter cut, performed in its entirety a cappella, is followed by Diana’s gospel hued *“Orphan’s Home,”* which toward the close finds the narrator welcome death since it promises an eternal reunion with loved ones. In *“Velma”* Byrd relates the real life story of Velma Margie Barfield, a series killer who married then poisoned Jonathan’s grandfather. The song previously appeared on Byrd’s solo debut **“Wildflowers”** [2000]. While many of the songs here reference loss borne in this life, as well as death and the expectation of boundless joy in the next, the pair lighten-up considerably for Jones’ happy-go-lucky album closer *“That Better Day.”* Vocally their voices intertwine to stunning effect and toward the close they even reprise a few lines from the Kahn/Egan/Whiting 1920’s favourite *“Ain’t We Got Fun.”*

Byrd is the son of a preacher, while Jones was adopted soon after birth [although many decades later she managed to locate her ‘musically inclined’ birth family] and I guess one could conclude that, individually, their ‘raisin’ has influenced the subjective thrust of **“Radio Soul.”**

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

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