



Michael Fracasso “**Back To Oklahoma**” India Records

Austin, Texas has been Michael’s home for around a decade now and during the nineteen-nineties he cut a trio of rather tuneful, and lyrically astute, discs in local studios. Nineteen is also a significant number here, since that is the track count on a release that breaks a three-year long silence. Produced by Charlie Sexton [sideman and *self-confessed* Michael Fracasso fan], the departure with this recording is that it was made at Greg Johnson’s Oklahoma City club, The Blue Door, before a capacity audience as Y2K drew to a close.

Following Johnson’s short [but punchy] introduction, Michael kicks off with the title cut, a song that first appeared on his debut Bohemia Beat album “**When I Lived In The Wild**” [1995]. In fact this collection neatly balances new and already familiar material at six cuts apiece. The latter include long established concert favourite “Brazos River Song,” Michael’s *greatest hit* “Big Sister” and “Wise Blood.”

Four tracks can be discounted, since they are mainly spoken, song introductions. While his previous recordings have consistently featured *wall to wall* Fracasso penned originals, three cover songs are featured here. The first, “Winin’ Boy Blues” is a Jerry Roll Morton classic, while “John Hardy” and “Dirty Old Town” can rightfully be claimed by the acoustic music community. I have always understood “John Hardy” to be a traditional song, yet it is credited here to Stanley Peter Frederick? Compounding the confusion, “Dirty Old Town” was most certainly written by a proud son of this soil [ie. The United Kingdom] – the late [and great], Ewan MacColl. Who, I wonder, is Dub Allbritten?

So what makes this recording [excuse the pun], a cut above the rest? For a start there’s the plain, *down home pickin’* simplicity – two voices, two guitars [and even when they’re electric, Charlie retains them at a neatly subdued level] and the occasional howl from Michael’s harmonica. Oh yes, and Michael’s occasional flashes of, *off the wall* humour. Then there are six new Fracasso songs. The first, “Elizabeth Lee,” underpinned by a repetitious, blues inspired, riff, finds the narrator relating that age-old scenario - his black-haired beauty and another man done him wrong, so at the wheel of his beloved Coupe De Ville the narrator “*ran her down like a dog.*” Two songs, “1950’s” and “1962” undoubtedly feature autobiographical content. In fact Michael introduces his six-minute plus exploration of that post WWII, age of innocence – aka “1950’s” - with the words “*This song embodies my parents life.*” Therein he relates how a couple survive, the premature death of a baby son on a Sunday night, a seven-month long strike at the mill and how “*the Bronx Bombers once ruled the heavens.*” Their faith is embodied in the words “*we’ll always have each other.*” The gentle love ballad “1962,” recalls the time of Cuban heeled boots and [nuclear] bomb shelters. “Gypsy Moth,” is also a love ballad, while Michael wrote the reflective “Never Enough” for his friend, Lucinda Williams. It’s fitting considering the recording location that stylistically, the rhythmically upbeat penultimate cut “Save Her Love” – which includes a passionate plea to resist the temptations of *disposable* consumerism - could have been drawn from Woody Guthrie’s canon.

Folkwax Score – 7 out of 10.

Arthur Wood
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