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Jeff Laine “Long Way to Go” (Independent 2004)

Available: Now. Review by Michael Mee,

The arrival of a new phenomenon. As you listen to Jeff Laine's new album prepare to enter a dark and gothic world. Long Way To Go provides a route map to some dark and sinister places. In order to fully appreciate the album you've got to give it a bit of time and effort but believe me the dividends reaped far outstrip those currently being garnered by investors in Shell. I started off by thinking the album was OK but that Nick Cave, Leonard Cohen and even Johnny Cash had already mined the rugged territory, could Jeff Laine extract anything more? The answer is deafening because although you'll hear threads of all the above, the end product is wonderfully creative and unique. It all opens with a pair of tracks that they should save for the end of the world, Long Way To Go and Dead Man. After that Laine gets really mean with a cover of the classic Frankie and Johnie that blows all other versions out of the water. In Laine's hands the tragedy is unremitting and unfiltered. Once in the song's grip there's no escape and it's a grip tightened by Laine's vocals that start from his bootstraps and the kind of harp playing, courtesy of James Powers, only found in places nice folks don't go. Following that blistering 'unholy' trio, Laine throws everyone a curve with the first of the two real ballads on the album, Waiting For You. That it's not a 'hearts and flowers' affair is hardly a surprise but what does stop you in your tracks is the anguish and heartache that is woven through it. The second 'curve' is perhaps even more marked, on an album of such raw feeling, Son is tender and touching. It's the song all fathers wish they could write, simple, basic but completely enchanting. The track is followed by another song torn from Laine's heart, Simple Man and while the emotional temperature is lowered, the quality of Laine's writing makes it just as telling as anything on the album. In essence Long Way To Go is as much a blues album as an alt country one and Jack Me Up marries the two together perfectly. Laine's seemingly bottomless voice is aided and abetted again by Powers' harp. The two in harmony make the song unstoppable. The sheer scope of the album makes it full of contradictions, it's difficult to imagine that the same man who sang Dead Man and Frankie and Johnie also reaches in and touches the soul on Mercy, the track that closes the album. If you fancy an emotional rollercoaster ride then climb aboard Long Way To Go.

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