

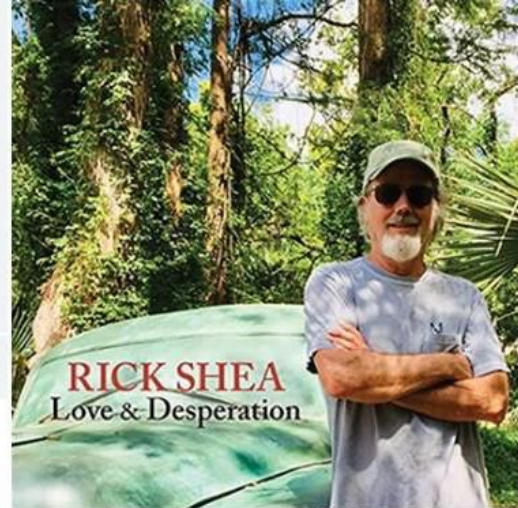
LONESOME HIGHWAY

HARDCORE COUNTRY, AMERICANA AND ROOTS MUSIC

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New Album Reviews

December 24, 2020



Rick Shea *Love & Desperation* Tres Pescadores

Like a great many artists whose movements have been restricted by the coronavirus pandemic, Rick Shea recorded a new album with a group of musicians who could each use a home studio to add their parts. The end result belies the method of its recording and is a welcome addition to Shea's canon of fine albums, which have established his standing as both a songwriter and singer. When you add to that his undoubted instrumental skills, it is all the more puzzling as to why he is not held in higher esteem. He is up there with Dave Alvin, in whose band The Guilty Men he has played. Alvin has called him "an incredible and intelligent musician ... with a voice I'd kill for."

A sentiment easily echoed for this, his 12th album, given the songs presented here. His fellow musicians here include Jeff Turmes and Dave Hall on bass, drummer Shawn Nourse, Phil Parlapiano on accordion, with a small number of additional players also involved outside these core players. Each is credited with their own studio location and it is another pointer to how music can cross over from different locations with technology, in way it couldn't in the past. However, Shea notes that though the results speak for themselves, he still misses having the musicians together in a single studio at the same time.

Ostensibly Shea's theme here is 'blues' but true to form, it is filtered through his distinctive personality and therefore sounds more of an individual take than anything more generic. The use of accordion on many of the cuts for instance, gives it a somewhat different feel than might be expected in the blues in general. Add that to Shea's distinctive vocal and his ability to put a story across and you have something that is for his fans but also a perfect place for any newcomer to start getting acquainted with this Californian stalwart.

The opening Al Ferrier written song *Blues Stop Knockin' At My Door* was recorded by Lazy Lester and is given an up-tempo treatment here, with a hint of rockabilly in its delivery. The final song *Texas Lawyer* is a song that is a favourite of Shea's in that he has recorded it on two previous albums. Shea felt that, aside from the late Chris Gaffney's contribution on the original, it never quite worked out as he would have liked. So, this may be considered the definite version. Like a number of his songs, it has a nice border feel that is enhanced by accordion and trumpet. Something that is equally apparent in *Juanita (Why Are You So Mean?)*. *Big Rain Is Coming' Mama* features Shea on steel guitar, another instrument on which he is noted for. There is a heartfelt expression in *A Tenderhearted Love* - a song that he wrote for his wife, whom he notes has had to deal with the vicissitudes of being married to a musician all these years. There is a personal angle to a number of the other songs also with the title track being a reflection on his parents and he draws on that close observation (often seen from close to home) for some of the other material. Nashville Blues offers his take on not moving to Music City and what might have been - for good or bad.

The World's Gone Crazy is both a warning as well as an exhortation to hang on to what you have in these strange times. Good advice and given in the context of some rewarding music. All in all, this is an album that has been made with care, attention and love, in a time that has been testing on many levels but Shea has given it his best shot and it's a hit.

Review by Stephen Rapid