

Deadman Take Up Your Mat And Walk

Rootsy/Sonic

DEADMAN are a new powerful force on the folk & roots rock scene of Austin, Texas.

In July, as an appetizer, *Live At The Saxon Pub* had been released to introduce them to the audience on this side of the Atlantic. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive to enthusiastic. Their tight sound - reminiscent of The Band - which effortlessly brings together Southern Rock, Texas Folk, Country Rock and 70ies old school rock'n'roll is certainly convincing to anyone flying the Americana flag. Now - as promised - we present their new studio effort *Take Up Your Mat And Walk*.

Deadman are not a new outfit, they're a band with a history. Or rather, their frontman Steven Collins has a history. He hails from Dallas, Texas and started the first formation of Deadman twelve years ago. A quartet with his wife Sherilyn on keys released a regional EP and in 2002 their full-length debut *Paramour*. Although the album was helmed by a high-caliber producer in Daniel Lanois-disciple Mark Howard (Chris Whitley, Vic Chesnutt, Lucinda Williams, Tito & Tarantula), it soon disappeared from record store shelves. The follow-up *Our Eternal Ghost* from 2005, also produced by Howard, was released on the renowned One Little Indian label. It focused - not only on the cover - on the husband & wife team Collins and marked a change of direction towards alt.country and duo folk comparable to that of Sarah Lee Guthrie and Johnny Irion. It took until 2008 until Deadman were heard of again - after Steven Collins had separated from his wife and moved to the ever-burgeoning musical hotbed of Austin, Texas. In the summer of 2008 *Severe Mercy* was released. The lyrics came fast with lots of relationship and separation issues to deal with - the album has a sad atmosphere with a sound & production style reminiscent of Daniel Lanois. As such, *Severe Mercy* dealt with the past but was also a step forward.

Steven Patrick Collins is lead singer, songwriter and rhythm guitarist of the newly formed six-piece band which features acoustic guitarist Kevin McCullough, drummer Kyle Schneider, organ player Mathew Mollica and excellent lead guitarist Jason Hildebrand. In contrast to Deadman's times in Dallas, the band is now a tight-knit unit, schooled in uncountable concerts - *Live At The Saxon Pub* is a glorious testament to this! However, *Take Up Your Mat And Walk*, the 5th album in Steven Collins' Deadman discography, is a whole 'nother thing focusing on the band's in-the-studio quality. In contrast to *Severe Mercy* and its artificially imposed soundscapes, the album was arranged in very natural 70ies fashion and recorded on analog equipment without outside production help.

Of the 10 songs - all of them Steven Collins compositions - half were recorded for the *Saxon Pub* album in rougher, groovier, gospel-infused live versions. Here, "If I Lay Down In The River", "Don't Do This To Me", "Oh Delilah", "Ain't No Music" and the title track are presented in a relaxed, off-the-cuff folk & country rock atmosphere. This is particularly remarkable on "Ain't No Music" which sounds like a forgotten outtake of Springsteen's *Nebraska*.

The heretofore unheard songs "Till The Morning Comes" and "I'm Not Who You Think I Am" are breezy alt.country rock numbers, firmly rooted in the 70ies but with a certain No Depression-generation extra. "This World's Gonna Change" reminds the listener even of Dylan's "Visions Of Johanna" - at least until Jason Hildebrand's gruff electric guitar alludes to the sound of Uncle Tupelo. "Gilead" is the album's most accessible song, once again comparable to The Band. "We All Need Love" boasts a strong four-part harmony vocal and a rolling Hammond organ while Steven Collins' vocals compete with the horn section in a manner not unlike Van Morrison's.

The album closer of *Take Up Your Mat And Walk* is the title track and with more than five minutes playing time the album's longest number, replete with Band-feeling, a Poco-like guitar part and an irresistible melody. This is how wonderful pure nostalgia can sound.

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