

CD Of The Month

CONNIE SMITH Long Line Of Heartaches

★★★★★



Long Line Of Heartaches / I'm Not Blue / Pain Of A Broken Heart / Ain't You Even Gonna Cry / I Don't Believe That's How You Feel / A Heart Like You / Anymore / That Makes Two Of Us / You And Me / My Part Of Forever / Blue Heartaches / Take My Hand
 Producer: Marty Stuart
Sugar Hill

Rarely have I been quite so excited about a new album, and I've had to keep it to myself for a couple of months (with a release date of Aug 23rd) since the promo arrived. New Connie Smith albums are rare these days. This is her first full album of new material since 1996 (and

only her second since 1978). George Jones named her his favourite female singer, and Dolly Parton once famously said, "There are only three female singers in the world; Streisand, Ronstadt and Connie Smith". My own take on it would be Wynette, k.d. lang, and Connie Smith.

Smith's 60s recordings have inspired a plethora of new young female country singers carrying the traditional torch and it's easy to see why. For this new record, Connie returned to Nashville's RCA Victor Studio B, where she recorded most of her chart-topping hits in her first years as a recording artist and got hubby Marty Stuart to produce. Together, Connie and Marty have also written five new songs for the album. Other material comes from notables such as Harlan Howard, Foster & Rice, Kostas, Johnny Russell and Dallas Frazier. Frazier has been a long-time favourite of Smith's, and his song - *A Heart Like You* becomes the 69th Frazier composition recorded by Connie, and breaks his 30 years of songwriting silence. Quite rightly this is bigged up in the press release as "an event within itself." The song doesn't disappoint either. With its "*What's a heart like you doing in a fool like me*" hook, some super steel

guitar, and a tune that would be the envy of any of the other big-hitting songwriting legends mentioned above, Smith delivers it perfectly, and it is probably the stand-out track on an album of killer songs.

The title track, which opens the album, is a Smith/Stuart co-write which could have been a left-over classic from the original *Once A Day* session - yes, it's that good! On the slower side there is Johnny Russell's beautiful *Ain't You Even Gonna Cry*, and the Kostas, Patty Loveless and Emory Gordy *That Makes Two Of Us*, with some stunning guitar work and Connie almost humming the outro.

Kostas is also one of the writers (along with Connie and Marty) on (the slightly reminiscent of *Raining In My Heart*.) *I'm Not Blue*, and *I Don't Believe That's How You Feel* (a Harlan Howard co-write) which you may remember by Tracy Byrd some years ago. The horns of the Tracy Byrd version (and indeed the original demo) are replaced by a guitar hook, and Connie's timing differs from Byrd's. Basically she has made it her own. It is wonderful to hear the work of Kostas again after something of a quiet spell for the Montana based writer.

Anymore is an old Roy

Druskey song which Smith has always wanted to record, and *You And Me* is an old Paycheck tune. Neither would have been out of place on one of her 1960s albums. *Blue Heartaches* is a straight country-blues that she and Marty began writing 15 years ago but only recently finished. It is perfectly suited to Smith's smoky vocals.

Throughout her career Connie Smith has cut many a gospel album, and closes her shows with a hymn. The final track on the album fits perfectly, but whilst sounding like a traditional piece, is actually a new song by Diane Berry.

With a terrific production, wonderful songs, and the voice of Connie Smith this will almost certainly be my album of the year. In fact I'd go further, it's likely to be an all-time favourite. Let's just hope she doesn't leave it so long until the next one.

Nobody could sum up *Long Line Of Heartaches* better than Connie herself who says, "I've had people ask me what this album was going to be like, since it's been a long time since they've heard me on record, but my musical tastes have remained the same. I wanted this to be traditional country, and it is."

Duncan Warwick

good it will have Colonel Sanders and Mrs Winner "*shakin' in their boots*". Could have perhaps done without the kiddie chorus at the end but it is mercifully short. There is a photo of a faintly embarrassed looking lady at the stove with some chicken pieces in her skillet in the inner liner card who we assume is Mrs Yates, the keeper of the wondrous recipe. I wonder if I asked her nicely...

The first single from the album is *Just Be You*, a happy-go-lucky, rinky-dink ditty about being true to yourself which has, incredibly, a guitar part appropriated from Herman's Hermit's *Mrs Brown You've Got A Lovely Daughter*. Yates would have been two

years old when this was a US hit but somebody on the session must have remembered it; and one the three guitarists listed on the session plays damped-down, muted chords tightly strummed at the top end of the fretboard - at least this is what it sounds like to me. Rather enchanting once you get over the shock.

While the radio single is *Just Be You*, a video has also been released, the unusual themed *On My Way (The Norway Song)*. Yates is one of those admirable country acts whose touring horizons are far more ambitious than many of his peers and has frequently played venues outside North America. Those country acts who have played overseas

have found it a rewarding experience for both artist and audience equally and Norway, it seems, is one of those territories than is especially receptive to the Yates brand of country. The singer has paid back this affection from his fans over there with a tribute to their homeland, a light, catchy midpacer, admittedly a little short on local colour and specific details in its lyric. However I had a peek at the video and was rewarded with some lovely scenic beauty mixed in with shorts of Norwegian country fans line dancing and waving to the camera and so on.

On more familiar ground we have the stone country *Our House Of Love*, a slow waltz-

timed stunner which would have been just so perfect for George Jones circa late 70s, early 80s. Of course it was Yates who penned one of the Possum's very best records in recent times, the melancholy, made-to-measure, self-deprecating *Choices*.

Other strong material to delight traditionalists includes *She's My Country Girl*, a chirrupy entry which manages to find all kind of new and imaginative angles on a theme which has been absolutely done to death. Similarly, *My Daddy Was A Chevy Man* manages to inject new life into a standard country motif, a song that sounds so much hewn from real life experience. Great, vivid imagery is conjured up here.