

COLIN LINDEN

From The Water

Of how many artists can it be said that they're getting better, 33 years into their recording career? **Colin Linden** can certainly be considered a member of that select club based on *From The Water*, the 11th solo album in a storied career that has also featured his work on literally hundreds of other records. At last count, the total of albums on which he has played stood at over 300, while at least 70 albums bear the 'Produced by Colin Linden' credit.

Linden is a genuine renaissance man of roots music. He's a singer and songwriter of great skill, an in-demand and prolific record producer (Bruce Cockburn, Tom Wilson, Colin James), a sideman to the stars as guitarist for the likes of Bruce Cockburn, Emmylou Harris, and Robert Plant and Alison Krauss, and, for the past decade, a member of the highly successful trio, Blackie and the Rodeo Kings.

Colin's songs have been covered by The Band, The Blind Boys of Alabama, Keb' Mo', and Colin James, and his well-stocked trophy case includes seven Juno, multiple Maple Blues Awards, and a Toronto Arts Award. He was nominated for a Grammy Award for the star-studded *A Tribute To Howlin' Wolf* CD, and was involved in the ground-breaking *O Brother Where Art Thou* phenomenon. Linden has a well-deserved reputation as a slide guitar virtuoso of real originality, and his riveting slide work can be heard both on albums from such artists as **Cassandra Wilson**, **The Rankin Family**, **Whitey Johnson** and on his own sizeable solo catalogue.

Colin's multi-faceted talents coalesce in truly compelling fashion on *From The Water*. This is a stylistically more diverse work than his previous outing, 2007's *easin' back to tennessee*. That acclaimed disc served as an homage to the acoustic country blues style that was the crucial inspiration for the Toronto-born and raised, Nashville-based Linden in his musically formative years.

From The Water can also be viewed as an homage of sorts. Colin's long-time musical collaborator and closest friend, legendary keyboardist Richard Bell, passed away in 2007, and his spirit is omnipresent here. The dynamic duo played on over 100 albums together (more than 40 of them Linden productions), including records by The Band, Bruce Cockburn, Lucinda Williams, Blackie and the Rodeo Kings and Colin James.

"We had such a giant, gaping hole in our hearts, our lives and our music," says Colin of his departed comrade. "Instead of trying to replace the irreplaceable, we all just tried to play more like Richard. We tried to incorporate his irreverence, his spirit, and his incredible musicality. I surrendered a lot to the emotion and you hope that lets you dig deeper. You are not so self-conscious in what you are doing. We all just tried to get better than we've been."

That determination paid off, as the depths of their grief clearly lifted Linden and his band up to greater musical heights on *From The Water*. The disc features his ace team of long-time musical accomplices, bassist Johnny Dymond, drummers Bryan Owings and Gary Craig (who doubled as associate producer), and keyboardist John Whynot, who also recorded the album. Guests include harmonica virtuoso Paul Reddick and the famed Memphis Horns, featuring Wayne Jackson.

This stellar cast proved the ideal accompanists for a collection of, in Colin's words, "some of the grooviest, funkier and most soulful songs I could have written and recorded." The central focus

throughout remains the potent combination of Linden's gritty and emotionally eloquent vocals, typically fluent and resonant guitar work, and songs saturated with gravitas, grace, and heart-rending soul.

From The Water was recorded in studios in both Nashville and Canada. "The spirit of the record had more to do with the people than the place this time," says Linden. "Much of what you hear is off the floor, with the basic band, then I spent a lot of time working on the little details."

Some notable co-writers contributed to these songs. "Trouble Only Comes in 3s" was written with Richard Bell while he was in hospital. "To take our minds off what was going on, I told Richard it was time to finish the song," recalls Colin. "I bought my guitar and notebook to the hospital one day, and we knocked it off. That song was born by the idea of Richard and I impersonating Peter Lorre in singing 'It Should Have Been Me' by Ray Charles."

Linden co-wrote two songs with his wife, novelist Janice Powers. "Smoke Em All" is about Bell ("tough like Chualo, with Ray Charles soul"), while slow blues ballad "Sinking Down Slow" was spawned by a lyric written by Powers for her new novel. One of Nashville's top songwriters Gary Nicholson aka Whitey Johnson co-wrote two numbers with his good pal Colin, "The Price You Pay" and the gentle and haunting closing cut, "God Will Always Remember Your Prayers."

Intriguingly, three songs here, "Devilment," the poetic and poignant "John Lennon In New Orleans," and "It's Later Than You Think," surfaced last year on Paul Reddick's acclaimed album, *Sugar Bird*. Colin produced and wrote or co-wrote all the numbers on that record, and these convincing reworkings prove that a good song can work with different treatments.

The title track was written by Linden in the wake of Katrina. "My wife kept having dreams about floods," he explains. "So many people who love music have a deep connection with New Orleans, and we were terrified by what went on there, the natural and the man-made disasters."

The imagery of water washes over much of this album. "Fundamentally, I feel that, in this period of time, in so many lives, there was a lot of water, a lot of tears shed," Linden explains. "But you can also view water as a place you get baptized in. No matter how crazy and chaotic and heart-breaking this time has been in history, I'm an optimist that we are coming out from the water."

With *From The Water*, Colin Linden has crafted a compelling work that will leave the listener feeling spiritually cleansed and musically reinvigorated.

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