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Chris Vallillo THE LAST DAY OF WINTER Gin Ridge Music GR-1010

Rating: 4 out of 5

Four 'mighty fine' Vallillo songs merge with nine instrumentals, originals and covers, on his sonically accomplished sixth solo outing.

By way of charting life in the Midwest, past and present, Illinois based Vallillo's half-dozen previous solo releases have been firmly planted in the soil of carefully selected covers and self-penned material, presented in an acoustic (folk) music framework. In his *THE LAST DAY OF WINTER* liner note Chris reveals "*For years I've collected and restored old stringed instruments – some high quality, most quite inexpensive – but each with its own unique voice.*" Relative to the contents of this release the closing phrase is the lynchpin, since the thirteen-selection *THE LAST DAY OF WINTER* merges instrumentals and songs – the former traditional and original, the latter all original. By way of adding some clarity, Vallillo's voice is heard on four self-penned tunes, and he's supported throughout by permutations of bass, drums, percussion, cello, fiddle and more. For those who reside in the Midwest, the album title would doubtless be spoken, followed by a sigh of great relief.....



The traditional *Old Joe Clark* opens, and the nine instrumentals include Vallillo originals *The Last Day Of Winter* and *Saugatuck* – the latter the name of a Lake Michigan shoreline town. I'll admit that for decades I've retained a soft spot for those (popular) traditional airs *The Water Is Wide* and *Shenandoah* and Vallillo truly does them justice here. Moving to the heart of 20th century there's The Champs 1958 transatlantic one-hit wonder *Tequila*, penned by the late Danny Flores, which won the first ever Best Rhythm & Blues Performance Grammy in 1958. Much favoured by country rock bands at the dawn of the nineteen-seventies, the gospel flavoured *Farther Along* lyric was penned in 1911 by an itinerant preacher and an instrumental rendition closes this collection.

Decades don't dim great songs and, here, Chris reprises *Silhouette Against The Stars* his "*chill of a November night*" tribute to Midwestern grain farmers. It previously appeared on his 1987 debut *THE WESTERN ILLINOIS RAG*. A letter from 'the road,' in the inspirational *Lettie's Song* the narrator observes a barn-raising, meets a "*woman in full bloom*" he last saw as a "*little girl*" and revisits an old, once familiar 'place of last retreat' that has become 'a big-time tourist town.' *River Road*, a travelogue in song, depicts Illinois fields that "*stretch out like endless rows of corduroy*," layers of limestone that "*bear witness to the years, prehistoric oceans, ancient belvederes*" and more. During the period 1875 – 1926, Illinois' Williamson County was the site of several outbreaks of violence. It's the 1922 Herrin miner's strike that's (specifically) recalled in *Bloody Williamson*. Detailed liner notes and photographs of the early to late 20th century instruments used to create *THE LAST DAY OF WINTER* – including a nine string guitar and a tenor lute - will be posted at www.chrisvallillo.com in the near future.

Arthur Wood © Kerrville Kronikles 11/12