

COUNTRY MUSIC & MORE MAGAZINE, UK

“Just A Songwriter” – Kenny Butterill

Album Review by Brian Ahearn

Canadian Kenny Butterill has lived in America since the '80s. He currently lives in the Santa Cruz Mountains in Northern California, thriving on the isolation and solitude that the wilderness offers him. He is the gentle and concerning type of guy that you would want for your best friend. His forte is song writing hence this brand new album Just A Songwriter. It follows the critically acclaimed debut album No One You Know, which introduced Kenny to the followers of the alt country Americana Charts and the European Radio Charts where his single “How Far Can We Go” made # 1 — this song also spent several months on the Canadian Charts.

Kenny has a laid back voice in the mode of Tony Joe White or Mark Knopfler. This bluesy feel is ideal for his intelligent story songs and sublime melodies that are presented with a ‘lived-in’ integrity that states ‘I have been there on the inside now I am looking to tell the clear story my way’. Kenny is one of those all too rare breeds of believable storytellers who makes you think, rather than pushing it in your face. I am a fan!

The title track “Just A Songwriter” opens up in anthem style to set the scene for the whole affair—this is Kenny’s story within his song. “My Austin Angel” goes into the Texas Alt-Country scene with clever wordplay and gentle melody linking to sell the song. “Canadian Road Trip” is a blues shuffle from coast to coast on the road. It hits a super groove too.

“The Email Song” in this computer age. Kenny’s way was with the power of the Internet to help create his market and fame and I dare say link him to old friends as the song implies. Nice idea and nice laid-back song. “Gotta Find A Woman” mixes acoustic blues with high recording technology with the four-part harmony sung by one guy John Lee Sanders. You cannot see the high tech only the front porch. “Felton’s Place” finds a Jerry Garcia groove while paying respect to Felton Pruitt one of the pioneers of the Americana music movement. The mood puts you into that area called Felton’s Place.

“Are You Surprised?” is a cool piece of alt country with some brilliant interplay between Canadian guitarist Ray Bonneville and American harp player Norton Buffalo. Yes, the same Norton from the Steve Miller Band, Commander Cody and many more. “Making Love In L.A.” features the smooth sax of John Lee Sanders alongside Kenny’s blues voice. “Joanne” visits contemporary country in relaxing mood while confessing to an unavailable love. The mood swings towards reggae for “A Couple Of Lines”, again proving Kenny’s immense song writing talent. This song deals with drugs.

“If We Were Alone” was first written by Kenny in 1980. It has a campus rock feel about it. All of the instrumental work is credited to Kenny’s old collage friend from that era Doug Hutchison. “Vegetarian Dead Cow Blues” is a smashing country blues shuffle featuring some great acoustic guitar picking and some laid back tongue in cheek humour. “Is There More?” is another questioning song with a powerful sensibility around a cool country groove direct from the back porch. “The Townes You Left Behind” is a splendid tribute to Townes Van Zandt. One of my songwriting heroes. Tell you what! Kenny Butterill is on my list especially after this album.

A couple of bonus tracks “Just A Songwriter” and “Are You Surprised” both extended versions, bring this smashing album to a close far to soon for me.

Highly recommended.

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For the latest updates, or to reach Kenny
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Thanks for listening!

Country Review

Kenny Butterill: Just A Songwriter

Album Review By George Peden

"Cause I like being just a songwriter. I don't fit the showbiz scene. I don't deal well with the road and I'd die in the Nashville machine. Yeah, I like being just a songwriter. Blending music with the words. Working on my own rainbow. Trying to be heard." Kenny Butterill from "Just A Songwriter".

Canadian Kenny Butterill brings a simple and no-nonsense approach to his music. If you need proof, look to his recording label - No Bull Songs. Then there is his latest album. Just A Songwriter is his second outing in three years. The return (due for release January 2003) features 14 self-written originals and 2 bonus reprise cuts, "Just A Songwriter" and "Are You Surprised?"

Simply put, this album is a tempered and insightful delight. This is pure Americana with splashes of blues, jazzy riffs, and alt-country fusions for equal measure. There is no Nashville bravado here. No big hats and oversized belt buckles, no glamour shots holding the promise of a CMT special from a cowboy clothes horse. No. What is on offer is a tuneful palette of blended artistry.

With Mark Knopflerish vocals, Butterill haunts the nooks of his lyrics with laid-back ease. It's a moody easiness, and it claims attention with addictive demand. One Canadian reviewer described Butterill as a stealth-mode, spotlight avoiding, hidden gem. Another labeled him as an artist of substance and depth. Both hit the bull's eye.

Aim your CD laser on any of these tracks, anywhere, and you enter a shared world of mood, intensity, and image. A lyrical world fashioned at Butterill's favorite writing haven - the back porch of his home in the Santa Cruz Mountains. A world he shares, freely, through his ample talents as a songwriter, singer, musician, and album producer.

"Just A Songwriter", the lead track, is a defining tune of personal promise. It offers a clear statement of intention from this happy non-conformist. The tune's core, that of being true to the music without chasing the glitz that anchors it, will also offer hope to artists questioning nervous career choices. Reprised also as a bonus cut, it comes with some skilled musical dueling from session nobility, Norton Buffalo and Ray Bonneville.

"My Austin Angel" comes clean with acoustic licks from country maverick Billy Don Burns. Burns, a gifted survivor in the David Allan Coe mold, has his own highly regarded CD, Train Called Lonesome; however, here, he adds his particular edge to a track tantalizing in affairs of time-tabled love. The song, too politically incorrect for Butterill's debut album, No One You Know, is back as a partly rewritten and sanitized album pleaser.

With tuneful precision, Butterill's voice nails his subject matter cleanly, as heard on the shuffling, blues-laced and harmonica-driven "Canadian Road Trip". The sparse, but adequate, lineup of Butterill and his Juno award-winning mates, Willie P Bennett (mandolin) and Ray Bonneville (guitar and harmonica), is bumps free on this rhythmic ride.

Modern realities come via "The E-mail Song". The keystone reconnection with a past lover, with its shared and frayed memories, leads into the lonely wishes of "Gotta Find A Woman". The mellow and multi-layered harmonies - sounding not unlike a Sunday night revival meeting - make the desperation sound inviting.

Other prime listening includes "Are You Surprised?", which is a bluesy nod to valued friendship. Then there is the collaborative heat of saxophone and expectation on "Making Love In L.A." The honoring of a modern hero lingers on "The Townes You Left Behind". The track pays homage to someone Butterill never met, but seldom forgets - Townes Van Zandt. "Vegetarian Dead Cow Blues" is a playful jibe at modern dietary trends, while "A Couple Of Lines" reveals coping skills for the sadly addicted. "Joanne", "If We Were Alone", and the search for meaning in "Is There More?" prove Butterill to be an inquisitive, sensitive soul.

Butterill pleases, immensely, on this album. His laid-back and too easy vocals, the shared and simple vantage points of his writing, and the progressive sounds of his studio band should equal wider recognition in 2003.

Kenny Butterill may see himself as just a songwriter. However, listen out for his album. It should prove to you - he's much more.

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