



ALBUM REVIEW

CHRIS SMITHER

More From The Levee

Signature Records



If you have to read this review to figure out this is a good album, you haven't listened to this guy through his 18 LPs in half a century. But if you're curious, you'll read it anyway. So, go ahead, take off your shoes. I'll wait. Chris Smither is one of the most consistent singer/songwriters in the business. This 18th release in half a century is a set of ten more recordings from the 24-song New Orleans session that gave us 2014's *Still On The Levee*. It contains adult love songs. And by adult, I don't mean X-rated. These are the thoughts of a man whose

lived life well spent.

He's as casual as John Prine and as comfortable as Tom Rush. Both he and Rush came out of what Dave Van Ronk called, "the Harvard Square folk scare" of the mid-60s. Smither was one of those Boston folkies you knew was more Cambridge Club 47 and not Greenwich Village Gaslight, academic and not commercial. As always, his songs here are as soothing as Constant Comment tea without ever being boring. And if that sounds like what you need in these jarring times, you're exactly right.

The lyrics of his songs follow threads that progress like the old Burma Shave signs that used to dot the highways. Follow his threads to the conclusion and you have a complete idea, sometimes within one or two lines. His couplets say more and/or beg more questions than many artists' entire careers. On "What I Do" he sings, "Birds don't understand the air/they don't even know it's there." Or on "Confirmation:" "If I tell you what the hell I'm up to/Maybe you can tell what's on my mind." On "I'm The Ride" he sings simply, "I'm not the passenger/I'm the ride." On songs like "Old Man Down" he sounds weathered, but not brittle. I imagine Ray Wylie Hubbard after a rare good night's sleep.

The other musicians here including the late and legendary Allen Toussaint on piano and drummer Billy Conway from Morphine and Treat Her Right, but you almost forget they're there, this CD is that intimate.

– Don Wilcock