



Duane Carleton's 'American Boy': Rocking Middle America

CD Review

By Art Edelstein Arts Correspondent

Duane Carleton from West Rutland was last year's Tammie winner in the rock music category. In 2007 he released "Once Lost, then Torn Down," a spirited album of charged Middle America music. That album had some strong songs about real people, showing life in places like Vermont and other rural areas outside of the pop culture wonderlands of New York and Los Angeles. Recently, we received "American Boy," Carleton's latest release. This 12-song CD continues his exploration of rock music in the vein of John Mellencamp, Bob Seger and Bruce Springsteen.

Carleton seems to be channeling the above-mentioned trio of rock stars in this very listenable album. I would also add the likes of Duane Allman and Dickey Betts to the performers Carleton has incorporated into his own sound. Both are Southern rock-guitar greats. This is both a plus and a minus. It's great to be compared to some of the best rock musicians this country has produced, but it's also hard to create a unique sound when you sound so much like so many other performers.

"American Boy" continues Carleton's exploration of rock themes that hew to a sound that eschews electronica and other "artificial" electric devices for the basic rock quartet sound of guitar, keyboard, bass and drums. While he plays electric guitar and there is electronic keyboard and bass on this CD the music is fairly straightforward, a basic menu of melodic songs light on complicated chordal complexity. His vocals vary from the highly charged on "Feel the Power" to the plaintive on "The Streets of Jericho," which also features former Band keyboard-wizard Garth Hudson on accordion.

The band here is solid. Tim Lynch, Bob Van Detta and Boyer on keyboards, bass and drums respectively do a fine job. Carleton plays over 200 gigs a year so he has a lot of time to hone the songs on this CD.

"American Boy" continues with some lyrics that praise small-town America, perhaps it's the "real America" that Sarah Palin was praising in the recent presidential campaign. She might have done better at the polls had Carleton and his band opened for her speeches.

With titles like "Feel The Power," "From a Broken Heart," "Living in a Lonesome Town," "Streets of Jericho" (is that the Vermont town?), "American Boy," "Take Me to Chelsea" (in Orange County?), "Havin' a Good Time Tonight," "In A Small Town," "Rock and Roll Party Queen" and "Goodbye Rosalie," the listener gets a fine sampling of party songs and a few songs with more social content.

This album, while great for dancing to, and technically and musically as good as Carleton's previous album, doesn't quite carry the water of "Once Lost, then Torn Down." I'd like to see this fine musician explore lyrical themes with more substance on his next CD. Still, if you like music that favors Middle America and Southern rock, albeit with a New England flavor, this album is worth a listen.

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