

The Arrow Stays True To Course

Four Winds Calling by Intuitive Compass

Review by Nazel Pickens

As the first darkly bent notes of the new Intuitive Compass album play through the well-worn speakers of my stereo (note: NOT COMPUTER), I feel a cold chill whirling around me, standing the hairs up on the back of my neck....then, suddenly, a more familiar and welcoming “who’o-hoo’d” chorus of Jason Dae West and Aurelia Anne Cohen pushes in like a warmer breeze, bringing me back to the place where we last parted with this creative duo....the next chapter of their unfolding story. It is quickly clear that this album reflects our uncertain times. Winds of change, many dark and sinister, some vital shiftings, and a few joyously playful, move all around and through us. This album seems an expression of this tumultuous period and their own personal uncertainties of being in this unwritten time and place. Some of these currents and storms change us forever, while others we attempt to evade or shelter ourselves from the force of their destructive qualities....winds calling to us as inspiration, as distraction, as overwhelming fronts, as currents to ride, but always as movement. This is how *Four Winds Calling* feels to me....like moving air going and coming from all directions. The late-night radio station collides with a desolate weather station....and no, we’re not in Kansas anymore. Songwriting, musicianship, execution, honesty, and creative vision, however, unlike these turbulent times, is anything but uncertain here, as we are once again given a clearly potent piece of work from the authentically unique Intuitive Compass.

The title track, “Four Winds Calling”, is classic Intuitive Compass, and is the album’s defining statement. “Heroes Unsung”, led by Aurelia vocally and on accordion, ominously tells the tale of genocide and colonization without hiding behind political rhetoric. “Smile On Denny”, takes on a rare groove-feel for these folks, but one fitting for their posthumous conversation with local legend Dennis Dragon, close friend and producer of a number of Intuitive Compass’s projects. “Beads Around My Neck”, again, hits a lighter groove and reflective tone, with home-spun and personalized lyrics that could meet up with John Prine on a back porch somewhere. “Lone Rider” returns to a darker western landscape of dried-up saddles, torn skin, and stained-teeth, all buried under six feet of snow, with a sonic quality feels like a mescaline-induced soundtrack. The mainly instrumental “Ghost Horse”, continues with the cinematic aesthetic, this time conjuring twists of an analog-stretched Spaghetti Western. And finally, it all comes back home bitter-sweetly with the countrified reminiscing of “Goodbye Josephine”, a weathering of time tale about a woman and a place simultaneously.

My only complaint is that it was all over too soon, but that’s what live performances and the rest of their catalog are for. Overall, *Four Winds Calling* is a seamless next album for a band that draws from a wellspring of experience and emotions beyond their age. The songwriting, vision, and instrumentation of West continues to inspire, while the chemistry with Cohen multiplies their individual talents. Special guest, Southern Oregon’s treasure Crystal Reeves, shines throughout with refined fiddle and even viola, while Nora Jean Hastay makes a welcomed return appearance on mandolin. Dan Sherril creeps in with some tenor banjo from time to time, Eric Jones holds it steady on upright bass, and John Lewis Richardson adds additional rhythm to some songs. All in total, while the gusts of winds may haphazardly spin the compass in twirling circles and down unexpected paths, when the storms calm and the dust settles, the arrow stays true to course.

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