

Daryl Mosley: The Secret of Life

The Secret of Life

CD: The Secret of Life

Artist: Daryl Mosley

Record Label: Pinecastle Recording Company

Artist Website: www.darylmosely.com

Label website: www.pinecastlemusic.com

Release Date: May 22, 2020

Songs

1. A Few Years Ago
2. The Secret of Life
3. In a Country Town
4. Hands in Wood
5. It Never Gets Old
6. Do What the Good Book Says
7. All the Way Home
8. Piece at a Time
9. The Deal
10. I'd Write You
11. Heartaches Moving In

I am presented with far more CDs than I can review, even presented with more CDs than I can listen to. I am even presented with CDs I have listened to but either could not make it through, or having made it through, never want to hear again: forgotten, tedious, mundane, run-of-the-mill, predictable, none of which are adjectives one wants applied to

their CD. ***The Secret of Life*** is none of those things.

I admire songwriting, and simply thrill when songwriters spread their skills across the whole spectrum of a CD. Daryl Mosley's skill is evident upon the first listen. A promo sheet sent to me by his publicist listed many awards for songwriting. His songwriting is not a fluke. It has been tried and tested, and with ***The Secret of Life***, we are presented with an entire portfolio of his work. Of the eleven songs in ***The Secret of Life***, nine were penned outright by Mosley, with another two sharing co-writer credits, one with Rick Lang and other with The Grascal's Danny Roberts.

Mosely has some serious word-weaving skills to bring out a story in song, particularly in the title cut, *The Secret of Life*, and *In a Country Town*, *Hands in Wood*, and *A Piece at a Time*. *The Secret of Life* is a feel good song advising the listener that life is just where you find it. *In a Country Town* captures the feeling of life in the rural route and all the things those who choose such a life see as blessings which some perceive as drawbacks. *Hands in Wood* is an outstanding treatise on making a living with your hands and forging out a life for yourself and your family by the skills you bring to your work.

I liked all the songs on the CD. *The Deal* was a little dark for me, but others may find in it their own Secret of Life. My toe was fairly well tapping as I got to *In a Country Town*. The recording, mixing, and mastering were so smooth, I took the CD out of my laptop and hustled over to my studio PC. I fired it up loud on my Mackie HR824 monitors. If there was any harshness, those monitors would reveal it. I smiled because there was none. I turned it up louder and louder, until the walls were shaking: just smooth. That's the way I like it. I tip my hat to producers Mosely and Roberts, Gorilla's Nest Studio, in Ashland City, TN, , and Audio Engineer Chris Latham. A couple of times I thought the fiddle was a bit too far back in the mix, but that is a matter of personal taste.

All in all, it is a great piece of work.

The CD does not list a banjo player, but two mandolin players, co-producer Danny Roberts being one, and Aaron McDaris being the other. I scrambled around to find out who the banjoist was, and saw on the promo sheet sent to me that it was McDaris. I do not know if McDaris also played the mandolin on this CD, but I enjoyed it (Roberts?) I particularly enjoyed the banjo playing. While there is the school in Bluegrass music that subscribes to the concept of the constantly driving banjo, I did not attend that school. While McDaris drove right on through a couple of tunes, he does so impeccably. I thoroughly enjoyed his work. I also enjoyed the backup runs on Tony Wray's guitar. The sound of the guitar and the dobro, together, on *It Never Gets Old* had a delightful understated strength. Understated strength is a good thing since it lets our own minds inhabit the music and pull from our own experiences, which makes for a song that touches us personally. I think *It Never Gets Old* is my favorite song on the CD; the close duet harmonies are just perfect. *I'd Write You* is a hot-on-its-heels second.

Do What the Good Book Says just re-queued itself on my CD player. My toe is tapping.

I like that. Congratulations, Pinecastle and Daryl Mosely!

Mississippi Chris Sharp

Stillhouse Junkies: Calamity

Stillhouse Junkies: Calamity

by Mississippi Chris Sharp

Artist: Stillhouse Junkies

CD: Calamity

Artist Website: www.stillhousejunkies.com

Back in June, 2018, Stillhouse Junkie bassist Cody Tinnin sent me their new CD, Over the Pass. I was excited enough by what I heard that I wrote a review which I published in my blog (Stillhouse Junkies – Over the Pass) It was fresh, dynamic music. You'll note that I was captivated.

I saw that their new CD, CALAMITY, was just released. Thinking it would be hard for them to top the fresh originality of Over the Pass, I asked Tinnin to send me a link so I could review it for The Bluegrass Standard. Before I listened, I asked Tinnin what his thoughts on their new album were. His reply was,

"This is our finest work yet for sure. Fred's songwriting is really great on this record and we accomplished what we set out to do which is to record a truly unique album."

My initial thoughts were that Cody might be a little hasty. I was sure they couldn't top Over the Pass. They did. And they did it admirably.

The Bluegrass Standard offers traditional and progressive Bluegrass, Americana, and roots music. We'll place this firmly in the progressive acoustic Americana category. It sure ain't Bill Monroe. It was not intended to be. Good music is just that, and my how I love to sit down and listen to a full album that has a theme. This album is like a good cigar; it takes time. Don't to bother spin it up unless you have the time to

be absorbed and transported to a different place. There's no two minute breakdowns here. With several songs going over six minutes, they weren't worried about air-play, but getting the point of their music across in their own way. I'd say mission accomplished.

The Stillhouse Junkies aren't another jam band. Calamity is complex, with tight arrangements, stunning segues between musical sections, a fabulous trio sounding like a much bigger band, and stellar songwriting. From the wings, one might hazard the idea that their music is experimental, bringing to mind Led Zepplin, The Allman Brothers, The Hot Club of France, music from Mark O'Connor's new age phase, David Grisman, the Newgrass Revival, with the occasional and welcomed Celtic twist.

If new and fresh music is their goal, then they clearly see a pathway to creating it. Fred Kosak's songwriting is wonderfully poetic and complex. A few lines just grabbed me: "But the truth I hear is what you make it, and that was forty years ago, when I gambled everything I had in the mountains of New Mexico", "Stay if you must, chasing rust from your pipe dreams", "Nothing waiting at the end but all the miles left to go", and "Giving up on your mission is as good as giving in. Do you spend a lifetime wishing for a fight you can't win?" This is painful but glorious songwriting.

Those last three lines come from the Shackelton Suite: three songs, three parts, telling the story of Sir Ernest Shackelton and the tragic yet triumphant voyage of the Endurance to Antarctica. No one seems to bother writing and performing thematic albums, though there certainly did at one time. You rock music fans might recall King Crimson, Yes, The Moody Blues and a few others, who had entire albums with a theme. Those may not have been the most commercially successful records, as they did not contain short, catchy songs, but they are still fresh and relevant as works of art. While Shackelton and his story may not be fresh, the triumphs and despairs of

the human spirit are always relevant. I salute The Stillhouse Junkies for tackling music in this way.

I really like the inclusion of a snippet of the "Mission Impossible" theme song in Burn it Down. Roll it Home is high energy acoustic rock. Mountains of New Mexico has delightful melodic punctuation and interaction in the band. No Deal channels the Hot Club of France and Grapelli. Coraline, about love gone wrong, just flies at 160+ BPM. A Hundred Days was recycled from their previous CD and captures the spirit of Lewis and Clark in a Led Zeppelinesque sort of way; apparently the artist is not through with this song and its story. I went back and looked, and this is the second time I hear wisps of Led Zeppelin. Then the Shackelton Suite has it's own operatic quality, as intense as a Handel Oratorio. And My Own Hands echoes the Newgrass Revival with great instrumental transitions between musical sections and ethereal fiddle harmonics.

Cody Tinnin (bass/vocals), Alissa Wolf (fiddle/vocals), and Fred Kosak (guitar/mandolin/vocals) have the synergy to sound like a much larger band, which is what happens when the music is in the pocket. I am looking forward to seeing them soon. Congratulations, Stillhouse Junkies, on being original all the way. This music is art, through and through. Outstanding.

Bluegrass Headquarters

CD Review

CD: *Bluegrass Headquarters*

Artist: **Jussi Syren and The Groundbreakers**

Artist Website: www.syren.fi

Label: Bluelight Records

Label Website: N/A

Reviewer: Mississippi Chris Sharp

Finland is said to be the world's happiest country. That may be, as the Nordic countries have long found out how to make the best out of their lives in lands of short summers and long winters. With that in mind, I found myself wishing for a plate of Poronkärästys or sautéed reindeer, one of the national dishes of Finland, as I listened to **Jussi Syren and the Groundbreaker's** CD, *Bluegrass Headquarters*. This CD starts and hardly stops for a breather. The first head-turner was the title cut, *Bluegrass Headquarters*, whereas the band was burning it up, some extremely hot fiddling had me reaching for the label to identify the fiddler. Mike Cleveland, it read. No wonder it turned my head.

I like that of the eleven songs on this CD, seven were penned by Syren, including the poignant *Okinawa Waltz*, which I enjoyed, which, along with *The Ballad of the White Death*, were about the only two songs in which one could catch one's breath. The instrumentals *Drop C Ride*, written by **Groundbreaker's** banjoist, Tauri Oksala, and the bluesy/modal *Road to Tammelund*, composed by Syren, were particularly enjoyable, with beautiful fiddle work by Cleveland and clear mandolin work by Syren. It reminded me of Monroe's *Last Days on Earth*, though I'll bet a dollar to a dime Monroe never had a plate of Poronkärästys.

Syren's gospel tune, *Put the Bible Back in School Rooms*, was as Stanley-esque as anything I ever heard, while the *Ode to Bluegrass Mandolin* worked in a medley of tunes between the verses. The rest of the CD put me in remembrance of Jimmy Martin in speed and drive, other than the traditional *Walking in Jerusalem Just Like John*, which had me thinking of The Sullivan Family.

Included in the mix of tunes was Billy Joe Shaver's *I Been to Georgia on a Fast Train*. I counted it several times, and this song was played just at 180 beats per minute, which is about as fast as a train can go in Georgia. Apparently, they can go faster in Finland. It was blistering. If it had been any faster, I don't know if my hearing could have kept up. Let no one say that the Finns cannot play as fast as the North Carolinians, both of whom can play faster than this Mississippian. Never mind me; just pass the Poronkäristys.

I particularly liked the Bob and Joe Tanner song *Bitter Tears*.

Bluegrass is alive and well in Finland. Served up with some fresh sautéed reindeer, Finnish Bluegrass would be just the thing to go with on this cold, Mississippi, February night. I expect a February night is much colder in Finland. Maybe Jussi and me will retreat to our saunas, the biggest difference being that I have no snowbank to plunge into after I come out. Maybe we'll both take a ride to our Gulf Coasts: me to the Gulf of Mexico, he to the Gulf of Bothnia. No matter how cold, we'll both have some hot bluegrass to warm us up.

The liner notes indicated that this CD was recorded live in

the studio with the exception of Cleveland's fiddle and the dobro overdubs. I enjoyed the natural room reverb or the excellent plate reverb that the recording engineer used. To my ear, many of the tracks could have benefited from a little more separation and less bleed-over. Other than that. I'll say nicely done.

Jussi Syren and the Groundbreakers' *Bluegrass Headquarters* is straight ahead bluegrass brought to you from the world's happiest country. It made me happy just to listen.

Mississippi Chris Sharp

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Barefoot Movement

by Mississippi Chris Sharp

CD: *Rise and Fly*

Artist: **The Barefoot Movement**

Artist Website: thebarefootmovementofficial.com

Label: Bonfire Recording Company/Bonfire Music Group

Label Website: www.bonfiremusicgroup.com

Reviewer: Mississippi Chris Sharp

There's something to be said for an EP release of your new CD. With a limited number of songs, one can make sure that each song is dynamite, which is what I'd unreservedly call the five songs on **The Barefoot Movement's** new EP release, *Rise and Fly*. There's only five songs, and easily five favorites.

This CD came into my hands the other day, along with several others, and I was encouraged to listen to it a hard listen. I looked at the stack of CDs I'd been handed, then looked at *Rise and Fly*. I shrugged my shoulders at the EP, noting only five songs. After listening, I wished there was at least five more, sure that if there had been, the additional five would have been as enjoyable as the five included.

The Barefoot Movement bills themselves as an Americana/Bluegrass/Roots/Rock Influenced band; that covers a lot of ground, so much ground as it really has little meaning. What I am certain of is that what I heard on the EP was fresh, new but not too new, as for some reason I could not help thinking of the late 60's Folk-Rock/Celtic group Fairport Convention as I listened, which many of you boomers like me recall as your first fine taste of guitar master Richard Thompson and his wonderful vocals and arrangements with the late Sandy Denny. If you do recall, you'll know this is some heady company. Whispers of Fleetwood Mac gave me a few gentle caresses, too: more heady company.

Of the five songs on this EP, four are originals by two

bandmates, fiddler Noah Wall and guitarist Alex Conerly. The rest of the band consists of Tommy Norris on Mandolin, and bassist Katie Blomarz. All band members share in the vocals. The EP information indicates Josh Hunt played the drums, and from the sound of it, a true percussionist and not a mere drummer, which is a sincere compliment.

I learned from the band's website that they were the recipients of 2014 IBMA Momentum Award. The momentum has apparently lagged a bit as six years later, I have in my hand this five song EP. I hope the momentum is gaining steam, that the fire is stoked, and the boiler pressure is on the rise. This is the first encounter I've had with this group, but I'd sure like to hear more. As for not being familiar with the band, I live in an apparent vacuum since the number of bands I have not heard of can only be counted in scientific notation.

Three of the songs were written by Wall: *Doin' Alright*, *Every Little Thing*, and *At the End of the Day*. One song was penned by Conerly: *Lonely Mississippi Blues*. Any guess as to which was my absolute favorite? Hands down, *Lonely Mississippi Blues*. I'm assuming Conerly belts out the lead vocals on this song, which makes me nostalgic for my beloved Mississippi, even though I'm in Mississippi as I write this. My nostalgia should be easily satisfied as I listen once more to Conerly belt it out, making me think of the great Alabama band Wet Willie, and their lead singer, Jimmy Hall, with faint echoes of Little Feat.

The lead single, *Early in the Morning*, is billed as a traditional song. I've never heard it before. The rousing a *capella* rendition was delightful, but not the single I would have picked for initial release. No doubt, this is the song that will come the closest to satisfying the traditionalist's tastes. Perhaps this is the reason for its release as a single. I can only speculate.

There's no indication of who's doing the singing on *At the End*

of the Day, but it was a beautiful rendition of a poignant lullaby to send me off into the ether, having enjoyed several listens as I write this.

Congratulations, to **The Barefoot Movement**. They look to have an a active touring season coming up. Maybe I'll get to see them. I'll be looking forward to it. Whenever your hard-to-define Americana/Bluegrass/Roots/Rock-Influenced band dredges up echoes of Fairport Convention, Fleetwood Mac, Wet Willie, and Little Feat, I'd say you were doing something right, even if defining the music isn't so easy. In fact, it is far easier to like that it is to define.

I like that about it.

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Oh Darlin

by Mississippi Chris Sharp

CD: Oh Darlin

Artist: Bradley and Adair

Artist Website: www.daleann.com; www.tinaadair.net

Label: Pinecastle Records

Label Website: www.pinecastlemusic.com

Reviewer: Mississippi Chris Sharp

If I were calling play by play like this review was a baseball game, I'd say that Dale Ann Bradley has hit a stand-up triple and clean-up batter Tina Adair is at the plate, 3-1 ahead in the count with an eagle eye on a soon-to-be hanging curveball just leaving the pitcher's hand. A savvy, experienced batter is likely to swat that ball right over the center-field fence. Game over.

I like duets, and **Oh Darlin** delivers powerful soulful singing, sibling-like harmonies, voices that startle you with power one minute and caress you the next, on close microphones in the studio, great band, excellent song selection, driving rhythm guitar, fine recording, mix, and mastering. Crank it up loud so your speakers can move a lot of air and it soothes, not seethes. The good stuff is always that way. This is good stuff.

The title cut, *Oh Darlin'*, sets the pace and timbre for this CD. It drives without speed, a longed-for effect in Bluegrass music, far easier to talk about than achieve. Curtis Vestal's thumping bass and Scott Vestal's banjo have me unable to keep from nodding my head in time with the music as the mandolin and guitar lay a colorful palette for the delicious vocals.

Mommy Please Stay Home With Me, an Eddy Arnold song, strongly reminded me of the Louvin's *Angels Rejoiced*, except this time it was "mommy gone bad" rather than daddy. The vocal twist on the last "please" produced some powerful chicken skin every time I heard it.

Jim Hurst's guitar work on the bluesy gospel song, *Send Me*, put a big smile on my face. It was good. It was unexpectedly good. I am delighted to get more than I expected.

Wicked Twisted Road is a moving ballad. Soulful singing about pain and crushed dreams, with beautiful guitar work and subdued music, softly cleared the way for gentle, heartfelt harmonies. "I ran out with the big dogs, guess I had more bark than bite. I knew I won the battle but in the end, I lost the fight" is as fine a line as a song can have. I salute songwriter Wally Braun and **Bradley & Adair** for delivering it with such intimacy.

Apartment #9 (Johnny Paycheck) and *Pick Me Up on Your Way Down* (Harlan Howard) ran straight into bonafide country music territory along with the two Hank songs, *The Log Train* and *Singing Waterfall*. *Singing Waterfall* is transporting. I closed my eyes and felt the loss in the song.

Hold to God's Unchanging Hand is one of my favorite songs. It is here powerfully rendered in call and answer form, giving me pause to consider things upon which I am building my hopes. I may need to rethink some of my plans.

The last song on the CD is *Rockin Alone in An Old Rocking Chair*. Songs that create images in our minds, yielding pictures and evoking memories, are more than just the words, or words put to music. The delivery is as important as the words, maybe more so. Some can hum up images with no words at all. Combine the words with stellar delivery and the images spring forth in living technicolor, in 3-D, with a clarity that can only be coaxed from within ourselves by every single

voice blending in tight harmony, close, as if the singers' lips were pressed to our ears breathing the song straight into our soul. What goes in our ears is the song and its delivery; what that delivery evokes is our essence. How can one not like that?

Dale Ann Bradley and Tina Adair are award-winning professionals. **Oh Darlin** is every bit as good as we expect it to be. It just might be even better, just like hearing the crack of the bat and watching the ball fly over the fence. I'm glad I'm in the stands, cheering on the two that crossed home plate. I'm sure glad I wasn't the pitcher.

The release date of **Oh Darlin** was February 27, 2020. It will be available through all major music outlets.

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The Quebe Sisters: CD Review

ARTIST: The Quebe Sisters

CD: The Quebe Sisters

Website: The Quebe Sisters

CD Release Date: September 2019

Reviewer: Mississippi Chris Sharp

email: mississippichris@bellsouth.net

I was sent a link to The Quebe Sisters Soundcloud page that had all the tracks of The Quebe Sisters self-titled CD. I listened to it and pondered the scope of the reviews I have been asked to do for The Bluegrass Standard. Some are hard-driving Bluegrass. Some are newgrass. Some are gospel. Some are raucous, rowdy old-time. Some are polished studio presentations. Some are precipitously live, warts and all. Some are released before they are through. Some are released long after they are through, with the post-production taking away from the performances. Some are recorded live in the studio. Some have more overdubs than a phlebotomist has needles. Some are jazzy, Dawgish, Flatt and Scruggish, Monroeish, Carterish, or Stanleyish. Some are tedious, unflattering, unenjoyable, unremarkable, unmarketable, and essentially unreviewable.

The Quebe Sisters self-titled CD is none of those things. If one adds another category of what this CD is not, one might rightly lump to It-Ain't- Bluegrass. It isn't, not by a long shot. Having consigned The Quebe Sisters to Blake's netherworld pandemonium of It-Ain't Bluegrass, I don't suppose it will bother the sisters much. They know their music isn't Bluegrass. They bill themselves as Progressive Western Swing and place themselves in the Americana genre on their Soundcloud page. After having made honestly derived observations of how to classify their music, we'll move on to the music itself.

It is delightful. It is transporting. It is nostalgic. It is sibling harmony and triple fiddles, all in true Texas style, a big band sound, although sparsely instrumented. It shouts of

Bob Wills, Johnny Gimble, and Texas Two-Step. It strongly hints at Django Rhinehart and the Hot Club of France, Stephan Grapelli, Dinah Shore, Doris Day, The Mills Brothers, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Harry James, Lena Horne, Gene Autry, gives a welcome nod to Kenny Baker and smells of fresh, strong coffee boiled in big pots hanging on spits at cowboy campfires on quiet, star-lit open-range nights, the sky as big as all Texas, the cowboys thinking of their girls at home, both lonesome and cheered by the sounds of The Quebe Sisters. The cowboys likely didn't have music queued up on a smartphone, earbuds, or a way to charge their phones while on the trail, if they had had them. They'd likely have abandoned the roundup to go and catch a glimpse of The Quebe Sisters and hear their music live, or at least find a way to charge their phone for more of the second-best thing, which is still good. Their memories of this music would come easy, as they hunkered down in their bedrolls by the embers of the fire, as the soft echoes of the lullaby "Twilight on the Trail" soothed them to a restful repose, smiles on their faces, their peaceful sleep whispering dreams of their darlings at home.

I regret that their website did not disclose the names of each angel-voiced Quebe Sister, or which ones did the lead singing, or of the guitarist who played the archtop guitar, at times beating it into submission without mercy and at others displaying the tenderness of a mother's touch, and the bassist who had the tone, attack, timbre, and touch I admire. I could find no record label information, nor any song credits. Perhaps their label or publicist can make this information easier to find on their website. I regret I did not have the physical CD in my hand to look at all the liner notes.

While this whole CD was enjoyable, even soothing, I have my favorites. Kenny Baker's "Bluegrass in the Backwoods" just jumped out at me. I was thankful to have this tune brought back to my memory and performed so well. Kenny is no doubt smiling. "The Waltz You Saved for Me" and the aforementioned

"Twilight on the Trail" were soft, soothing, like a balm for a tired soul. Other favorites are "Pierce the Blue", "Lullaby of the Leaves", and "Summer of Roses", each featuring profoundly tight sibling harmonies and a cohesive, spartan band, every note contributing to the whole sound, with the harmony of the triple fiddles always complimenting the vocal harmonies.

I keep reaching for the word soothing. I had wanted to hear this without knowing it existed. I had yearned for it. I longed to be touched by someone else's music. I am declaring myself to you now; I was more than touched. I was soothed.

I am looking forward to seeing The Quebe Sisters for myself, closing my eyes, lending my ears, and being soothed some more. Someone once told me I "Always Seem to Get Things Wrong" (a delightful two-stepping song on this CD). Well, I got this one right. Had I spent my money on this CD, I'd consider it well spent.