

# Steve Ludwig and the Casual Hobos

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*CD: Deepest Shade of Blue*

*Artist: Steve Ludwig and the Casual Hobos*

*Label: n/a*

*Artist Website: none listed.*

It's 3:30 in the morning and there is no one to call even if I had a phone number. I'm not one who makes a call when reviewing a CD, but in this case, I'd make an exception. Even if I had a phone number, no one wants to chat at 3:30AM, and a looming deadline tables the motion to call later because by the time later gets here, I'll be through with this review. Google reveals no web site. There is no label information on the CD jacket. I don't know anything about Steve Ludwig and the Casual Hobos other than what is revealed on the CD jacket, which is little other than the names and duties of the participants. Is it me? Am I missing something? There is something to be said for making things easy for the reviewer.

Here's what was revealed on the CD Jacket. There are eight original songs penned by Steve Ludwig, who is a BMI affiliated artist. The musicians are Steve Ludwig, lead vocals and guitar; Trish Imbragno, bass on all tracks but one; Jason Ericsson, banjo; Marina Pendleton, fiddle, and mandolin on songs 1, 5, and 6; Stephanie Green, fiddle on songs 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8; and Sam Stuckey, tenor vocals and bass on song 6. Stuckey also recorded, mixed, and mastered this CD; the CD photos are attributed to one Kristinite, and a train logo on the back cover is attributed to one Kel-Kel.

# **The songs are:**

**Good Thing I Like Falling Too**

**Down in the Deepest Shade of Blue**

**The Old Place**

**When Your Love Triangle Turns to Square**

**Again in My Dreams**

**Don't Leave Early from the Party**

**I'm So Dumb That I'm Happy**

**Just a Friend**

I was able to discern quite a bit more by listening to the CD four times straight through, three on a trip to town yesterday, which was easy enough because it is a thirty-minute drive to town and I took a rambling, circuitous route home (a COVID side effect: a ramble through the countryside just because I can), and one more time this morning. The CD is cued up and playing as I write this. By the time I'm finished writing, it'll be five times through. That really says more than the sparse writing, since most CDs that pass my way can't make it through five listens.

My favorite songs are The Old Place, which had me smiling and recalling the sound of The Whitstein Brothers, which is a powerfully good thing; the country ballad When Your Love Triangle Turns to Square which features Ludwig's voice-breaking, yodel-esque tenor, reminiscent of Hank Senior, or Emmett Miller, depending on how far one's musical tastes venture back; Again in My Dreams; Don't Leave Early from the Party; and I'm So Dumb That I'm Happy, another love gone wrong country ballad.

In a hand-written note to the publisher, Ludwig stated that

they “drew inspiration from Reno and Smiley, Flatt & Scruggs, and many, many more.” I hear those influences, including the many, many more. More than one song on this CD had me recalling the Flatt & Scruggs song Why Did You Wander, which is testimony to their influence. I particularly enjoyed Jason Ericsson’s outstanding banjo playing: tone, timbre, attack, timing, and taste; the banjo break on Just a Friend thumped from start to finish. I found Marina Pendleton’s fiddle work particularly enjoyable.

I completely understand budget constraints of the recording and manufacturing of a CD, but I think the overall CD would have benefited from an unconnected mastering step. By the time one gets to the mastering phase, the recording and mixing engineer can become too close to the music to objectively hear the overall sound. This is the exact place where the ears of the mastering engineer are the most beneficial. It was enjoyable, still, though it had me scrambling for the EQ.

Steve Ludwig is on the right track. I admire original music, which enables one to develop their own sound even through their multiple influences. Original music is risky and so is venturing out to create one’s own sound. The risk is worth the reward. Keep risking, Steve Ludwig. I’m liking what I’m hearing.

**Mississippi Chris Sharp**

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