

for it to be reviewed alongside all the other new releases, inevitably from the biggest names in the business, you have to expect a result like this.

Chris Smith

ANNETTE CONLON Life, Death And The Spaces Between

★★★★★



Cedar Box / Live Like An Angel / Life, Death And The Spaces Between / First Suicide / Signed, Love Me / Fell / Without You / Faceless Angel / Rodeo / Ten Thousand Steps / That's The Way It Goes / Canyon Winds / Off The Rails / You Gave Me Wings / Sweet Sophia
Producer: Ted Wulfers
Self Released
61:07

Life, death, and the spaces between. It is perhaps the spaces between that scare us the most. Back in January 2002 I found myself down on my living room floor unable to stand, wondering if I was having a heart attack. Many trips in various ambulances to hospitals failed to discover the truth. I spent the next six months in a kind of limbo between life and death, hardly able to stand up. Another person in big trouble was Country/Americana singer, Annette Conlon who faced the possibility of death in 2012. The singer later had three surgeries which left the right side of her vocal chords paralysed. She was told she would never be

the same again. However, she didn't give up, instead as her voice returned she created a wonderful solo debut CD. Annette Conlon was previously in the Alt. Rock band, Eden Automatic.

The album is anchored by a banjo which runs through the self written songs like a thread. The disc has the contradiction of warm exciting music and melodies with some darker lyrics. Words that needed to flow from the singer's crowded mind. Opening song *Cedar Box* is infectious, with the nagging banjo, superb vocal and melody wonderfully at odds with the darkness of the lyrics about death and being "laid down in a cedar box". The important track, *Live Like An Angel* is about fighting through the despair brought on by illness, both mental and physical. Annette Conlon's vocal hints at the despair she has felt. You sense this song means a lot to the singer which enhances the reality of the superb track.

Annette Conlon's voice sounds a bit like Rie Sinclair from the underrated country band Violet And Mayhem. The CD has one very commercial song, *Rodeo*, with it's sing-along chorus it deserves to be a big hit, but sadly won't be. The song *Ten Thousand Steps* is about hope and moving away from pain. The steel guitar and banjo are married together on this uplifting track, which has the power of a gospel song.

Annette Conlon has given us 15 remarkable songs. She emerges at once as a major talent, driven on by her nightmare illness. Ironically this album might not have been quite as great as it is if the singer had not been pushed to greatness by the situation in which she found herself. The final song, *Sweet Sophia*, with its delicate vocal ends the

album on a high, and is that a cat, right at the end? It sure sounds like one.

Annette Conlon has created a moving, intimate, magical, melodic country trip into her troubled mind. Anyone who has been hit by a major trauma or illness should be able to relate to this disc of redemption and hope, and if there is a message from this CD it is simply, do not give up. If you are thinking of throwing the towel in, don't, just buy Annette Conlon's entertaining, slightly troubled masterpiece.

Paul Riley

LEGENDS OF COUNTRY Talk About Country

★ 1/2



It's A Start / Talk About Country / If I Knew What I Was Doing / I'd Be Dangerous / Old Guns / Different Planets / Jelly And Jam / Forty In The Spring / Turn To Dolly / Gone Leaving / As Country As They Come / The Saturday Dads / It's A Long Way Back From A Dream
Producer: Rob Jones
Absolute / Universal
42:33

Oh my, I think I feel a rant coming on. First off, could there possibly be a worse name for a band than Legends Of Country? As if that wasn't bad enough there's the title track – *Talk About Country*, which talks of 45s all over the floor, Charlie Rich's *Behind Closed Doors*, Dolly and Porter, Willie and

Waylon, Delta Dawn, and Olivia Newton John! The band, and I hardly want to mention the name again as it makes me cringe, was apparently formed by Jof Owen who is from a band called The Boy Least Likely To. As far as I'm aware I've never heard them, but I have heard the name somewhere so by that I assume they must have had some success because I am usually wallowing in my country bubble. The press release says that this was "inspired by a long standing love of country music... and growing up watching Pebble Mill and listening to Johnny Cash and George Hamilton IV", and I get the feeling that Jof hasn't delved much deeper or listened to anything country since Pebble Mill filled our lunchtime schedule.

To its credit though, all the songs are original, I'd rather listen to this than a bunch of dodgy covers (Gone Country come to mind), and there are one or two interesting ideas for a song on occasion. I really like the references to the quintessentially English things like Benson & Hedges and Little Chefs, but overall I'm afraid it sounds like a piss-take.

Maybe if the band or producer sounded as if they'd ever actually heard a country record it might have been better. It also doesn't help that Jof Owen has one of those whiny little voices so beloved in indie-pop circles that just doesn't have any gravitas for singing country. When he sings "I'm as country as they come" I just can't believe him. *If I Knew What I Was Doing I'd Be Dangerous* sums it up. "If I knew what I was doing I'd be dangerous but I don't." He doesn't, and they don't. Not a single one of them by the sound of things.

Duncan Warwick