

'City Of Song' by The Battered Case

Reviewed by Carl Filby (March 2024)



Mark Gamon and **Matt Kelly** are the constant figures in Thursday's Band which has been around for a few years now and which Mark describes as a "weird and wonderful string driven thing". This excursion from the main band music is also described by Mark as "The first in an occasional side hustle album series from various members of Thursday's Band" so it's nice to see the other two members of the band, Rhys Wilson and David Cammish assist on a couple of tracks, with Ali

Cosser, Mark's bandmate from Sky West, also adding her vocals to good effect on several tracks.

It's well-known that Mark Gamon is a 'wordsmith' so it's difficult to resist using his own words to describe this album: "Ten new recordings, ten songs stretching back beyond lockdown. Four tracks celebrating New York, one celebrating new life. One unpicking a memory, one a mystery. The rest - like all the best songs - are just about how to survive." I was pleased to find the lyrics to all the songs except for 'Hollow' (an oversight?) on Mark's website but would have been even more delighted to find a short explanation of the origin or background to each song available somewhere. It sounds as though I am being hypercritical at this point but let me explain.

The songs are a mixture of observations, celebrations and reflections on life interlaced with some historical, cultural and geographical references. I like the way that Mark describes his dreams in **Rip Van Winkle** and then leaves the listener to unravel the metaphors rather than dwelling on the negatives, but I'm interested enough to appreciate a bit more insight into his thinking. Also, someone who has not had the love affair that Mark clearly has with many aspects of life the other side of the pond could do with a bit of help with the cultural references, not to mention the food. What are **Schmears on Sissel Rye**? I googled it of course, inconclusively, but more importantly this and other songs made me want to share some of these food and other cultural experiences.

Often owing to time and space constraints, album reviews tend to be based on first impressions leaving some songs initially overshadowed by others which are more immediately appealing. Bearing that in mind, my immediate favourites were **Hollow**, **All The Way To Istanbul** and **The Ocean**. I love the sound of the electric guitar and the way that the melody is both supported and developed by Matt's flowing violin and on the first in particular has a transatlantic, slightly echoey and western feel reminiscent of some early 60s hits in the UK. Who wouldn't want to point a converted Bedford ambulance pointed towards Istanbul and freedom especially with Brigitte Bardot and Joni Mitchell on board and it's easy to forget to enjoy the present whilst you can.

I wouldn't want to have been part of the crew of the **Half Moon** during Henry Hudson's 17th century exploration of the river now known by his name but I enjoyed listening to the song and the authentic historical touches, as when Colman gets it in the neck. I have my immediate favourites but there is a lot to like on this album and the other songs are growing on me with each new play.

The album is launched at Cambridge Folk club on 22nd March and you can find out more [HERE](#).