



Darrell Scott ***The Couchville Sessions***

"I look like an insider because of everything I've done but I always felt like an outsider," Darrell Scott says. "And that's important—to be an outsider." He's also a master. Witness his ability to make just about any instrument talk, listen to his vocals and songwriting to hear him contain every emotion between joy and pain within one verse in his singing *and* in his pen. Nowadays he's taking the outsider role even more seriously; after 23 years in Nashville he spent the last year devoting himself to a self-sufficient lifestyle in the country while simultaneously putting together his best album in years.

Couchville Sessions is that album, and it continues Scott's long tradition of tackling the profound issues—loneliness, the demise of relationships, mortality—without ever becoming maudlin. The record may explore darkness but there is always light. Scott can sing to us about addiction, breaking up, even dying without it ever becoming depressing. That's due to his writing, his vocal delivery—often erotically charged here—and the careful choice of five covers that he calls tributes to some of the masters. Scott's tenth studio album shows no sign of him losing steam. In fact, he seems to be on fire.

Born in Eastern Kentucky to restless Appalachians who moved him Out West, raised by a country-music-worshipping single father, he studied poetry with Philip Levine, a celebrator of the working class who would later become the nation's Poet Laureate. Scott has lived the songs he sings: he's worked hard, told defiant truths, and never turned down the chance to pursue love. Along the way he has created an oeuvre of albums beloved by his devoted fans and written songs that became hits for everyone from Dixie Chicks to Travis Tritt as well as being covered by more than 70 others while never shying away from critiquing the industry. The multi-talented Grammy nominee has also been a member of Robert Plant's Band of Joy, won the AMA Song of the Year, named ASCAP's Songwriter of the Year and a host of other accolades.

Scott recorded the songs on *The Couchville Sessions* fifteen years ago and is only now releasing them not because they're something inferior that he cast aside. On the contrary, he's releasing this album because the songs were too good to remain silent. "I'm trying to catch up on records I've already recorded or what I have in my brain to do," he says. "One of my problems is that I have more records than I have record releases." He also held off on releasing the album until he could get a few extra touches he always wanted on these songs—a Guy Clark guest spot here, triple fiddles there, a Peter Rowan vocal here. "These songs have really stood the test of time," he says. "They still move me."

He's not alone. This is perhaps his most emotionally-charged collection of songs and they're anchored by the theme of acceptance, whether it's a man appreciating the good parts of a relationship he wants out of in songs like "It's Time To Go Away", a lovely cover of James Taylor's "Another Grey Morning" and "This is The Love Song" or a woman embracing the beauty of the fullest moon she's ever seen while her relationship unravels on a car-ride home from the Laundromat on "Waiting for the Clothes to Get Clean." There's the acceptance of mortality in a tune like "Another Day to Live and Die" and a narrator succumbing completely to his addiction in Hank Williams' "Ramblin' Man". There's well-crafted fun with Townes Van Zandt's "Loretta", and the sexy proposition of "Come Into This Room". Scott continues his tradition of challenging the music industry with critiques like the epic album opener "Down to the River" and a look at mainstream radio called "Morning Man". Every one of the fourteen tracks are packed with that hardcore emotion and it is all delivered with mesmerizing vocals and some of the best picking you're liable to find on any other album this year. There's plenty of rocking-out, too, especially on covers of Johnny Cash's "Big River" and Peter Rowan's "Midnight Moonlight," an instrumental highlight of the record.

While the covers on the album pay homage to some of music's best-known masters, Scott says that it's also a gathering of master musicians, or, as he calls them: "monsters." The five member band includes Scott along with steel guitar virtuoso Dan Dugmore; Kenny Malone, offering his unparalleled percussion; one of England's most acclaimed musicians, Danny Thompson, playing his famous double bass; and Bill Payne (Little Feat, Bob Seger) on piano and organ. "These guys are in their 70s and they're kicking ass," Scott says. "When you're working with musicians like this, you can be as live and as unmessed with as you want because they can do it, they have no fear, they can play anything." There are also guest musicians such as Shad Cobb, guest vocals by folks like John Cowan and Peter Rowan, as well as a treasure of a spoken monologue by the great Guy Clark.

Except for a small addition here and there—stirring background vocals by Andrea Zonn and Jason Eskridge, for example—the entire record was recorded live in Scott's living room out on Couchville Pike, the road that gives the album its name. Now Scott is living on the Cumberland Plateau between Knoxville and Nashville with forty solar panels where he cans vegetables he raises in his garden, and was able to edit this album on his woodstove during the summer when it wasn't being used to heat his cabin. The new locale is working for him, he says. "Not being in Nashville means I don't have to have Nashville concerns around me. And it means that I care less than I ever did about what's going on in the industry. I like that."

Scott's honesty and defiance have always fueled his best work, and that's certainly true of *The Couchville Sessions*, an album that finds its creator at the height of his songwriting, vocal, instrumental, and producing powers. Scott has made a record with master musicians and has identified some of his favorite masters to pay homage to in expert covers. What the listener of *The Couchville Sessions* knows is that undoubtedly Scott is a master, too.