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## THE SHOOTOUTS SWITCHBACK

5 ★★★★★



*Trampoline / The Other Side of My Life / Only You / Half a World Away / I'll Be Damned / Just Another Sunday / Switchback / A Few Old Memories / Your Love (I'm Afraid Of) / Only Good at Goodbye / Blue Eyes / Dancing With the Distance*

Producer: Dan Knobler

Transoceanic Records

41:38

From Akron, Ohio, the city that brought us both Devo and The Pretenders, The Shootouts are a self-proclaimed Rustic Americana trio who have played the Opry and can thus

call on a little help from their friends. Mickey Raphael brings his harmonica and Sam Bush his mandolin, with Vince Gill, Lindsay Lou and Rodney Crowell popping in too. Another famous fan, Jim Lauderdale, is appearing at the launch in Akron of this, their fourth album, at the end of May.

Lindsay supports Ryan Humbert's lead vocals on the excellent opening track and lead single *Trampoline* ("land on your feet") and on a version of *Only You*, the old chestnut written by Vince Clarke and originally sung by Alison Moyet, which the band twist into a toe-tapper enlivened by Bush and Raphael.

Gill appears on the magnificently arranged *I'll Be Damned*, a piano-driven slice of Western Swing he wrote back in 1980 before he was launched as a quintuple threat: singer, songwriter, guitar player, scratch

golfer and Amy Grant's husband. Crowell, whose catalogue is explored on Willie Nelson's new album and whose daughter is married to producer Knobler, adds gravitas to the gorgeous and melancholy *Half a World Away*, which includes vocab like "doppelgangers" and a life lesson, "borrowed time runs out too soon", Crowell might have imparted back in 1988.

Elsewhere, *Just Another Sunday* is suitably languorous, *Blue Eyes* ("we both need somebody's touch") mellifluous and the ballad *A Few Old Memories* ("that I wanna make with you") has Humbert sighing that "tomorrow talks a good line but today pulls all the strings". "Paranoia" is the first word of the hellishly catchy *Your Love (I'm Afraid Of)*, whereas the power-poppy *The Other Side of My Life* suits Humbert's voice, which recalls that of Ed Robertson of Barenaked Ladies.

I score the title track as a draw between the prestidigitator of Bush and guitarist Brian Poston, whose instrument further

enlivens songs that are already quite lively, thanks to Knobler's astonishingly good production. One of Poston's licks introduces *Only Good at Goodbye*, a proper country song where Humbert embodies a klutz of a character who offers heartbreak, not true love. *Dancing With the Distance* closes the album in an atmospheric and meta manner, with the listener picturing a guitar that used to play "the songs that Prine and Haggard made" and which Humbert picks up again, or rather hands to Poston to rattle out a Southern rock solo.

Chris Smith of this parish gave the band's first two albums five stars, while I had a great time with *Stampede!* when it came out in 2023. I presume that you already know how great The Shootouts are, so my confirmation of this may be nothing new, but if you haven't yet discovered them and still don't give this spectacular album a whirl, more fool you.

Jonny Brick