

ANNE KIRKPATRICK “ANNETHOLOGY” CD notes.....GLENN A BAKER (2010)

I just came across something I wrote a dozen or so years ago. “Anne Kirkpatrick”, I determined, “is not only one of the most awarded Australian female country performers, she is also the most important. Working from within, from the midst of the revered First Family of country, she has diligently chipped away at the narrow confines and limitations placed upon the music in this country, not with flash and clamour but with an innate understanding of the essential qualities which renders truly great country music so emotionally overwhelming.”

And I wasn't alone in that conclusion. Around the same time, the Sydney Morning Herald's Bruce Elder offered: "A true revolutionary.....in a very real sense Anne Kirkpatrick is the godmother of Australian 'new country', determined to drag the music through the 1990s". A staunch admirer, back in 1991 he'd enthused over her pivotal, *Out Of The Blue* album, "There can be little argument that this is the best country album ever released in Australia. The strengths are prodigious. The playing and production match anything to come out of Nashville. The material is exceptionally well written and lyrically adept, with metaphors teased out in clever conceits and sentimental ballads which are persuasive and moving rather than over-stated and corny. She is now, unambiguously, our finest country performer." In a review of a performance at Sydney's The Basement, he marvelled, "She is now her own woman and both her material and her choice of venue show how far she is prepared to go to redefine Australian country music."

There seems an element of destiny or perhaps inevitability in the rise of this most engaging singer-songwriter and performer. A recording artist since the age of 12, Anne, the only daughter of revered Australian country music pioneers Slim Dusty and Joy McKean, staked her claim as a woman of distinctive voice with the impressive 1974 *Down Home* album (veteran producer Peter Dawkins had taken her into the studio to cut a 'solo' single some time before) and since then has crafted and delivered, at irregular intervals woven around the raising of a family, accomplished and ever-evolving albums.

It was with the assistance of a few like-minded musicians from her fathers' crack backing band that the Anne Kirkpatrick Band came into existence.

Playing the inner city pub circuit ,they gained a strong mainstream audience while consolidating a loyal country audience. “Back then, not a lot of people were playing country in the city ----the band and I had a residency at the Civic Hotel on Goulburn Street—the joint really rocked on a Monday.---we also developed a strong following at the Niterider and Lone Star Café, she recalls”

She certainly paved the way for a broader grasp of the varied components that make up the gestalt that is contemporary country music. "My root influences are people like Merle Haggard, Buck Owens, Patsy Cline, Hank Williams ,Waylon Jennings and of course, Slim Dusty and Joy McKean " she has revealed." I'd rifle through Mum and Dad's collection at home and listen to all this great stuff—also the music of Carter family and Jimmie Rodgers. I really loved Wanda Jackson, and the Beatles too. "

She also soaked up like the proverbial sponge the then-radical country-rock sounds while a university student and campus folk/blues club member in Sydney in the early 70s, with enthusiasms for people like Maria Muldaur, the Dillards, Linda Ronstadt, Jerry Jeff Walker, the Byrds and the Eagles. In time, songs from Gene Clark, John Sebastian, Gram Parsons, the Dillard & Clark Expedition, Paul Siebel, Kate & Anna McGarrigle and Neil Young would find their way onto her albums alongside hauntingly pure bush laments from the pen of her mother Joy McKean, one of the nation's finest tunesmiths. She recalls "I learned songs like *Bury Me Beneath The Willow* from mum, along with a lot of old Carter Family tunes, when I was quite young. She used to do quite a bit of that stuff in the show then - bluegrass acoustic stuff. "

Anne's deep affection for that particular wellspring was obvious in her fine renditions but, at the same time, rock (country or otherwise) didn't intimidate her like it did so many others in the close, tradition-bound community. She recorded Daddy Cool's *Come Back Again* as a 1987 album title track as well as songs by Russell Morris, Paul Kelly, Bob Dylan, Don Walker, Kim Carnes, and British new waver Mickey Jupp.

Though, it is worth keeping in mind that she didn't have to. As the daughter of the deified Slim Dusty MBE she could have found a comfortable niche in the bush ballad tradition, with a ready constant audience. She could easily have been Anne Dusty, and, having been on the road with the top-draw family show from her early childhood, eventually with her own segment, it must have been tempting at some point.

"It was my mum and dad's way of life and I soaked it up," she has said. "They taught me to listen to harmonies and how to play the guitar. I've always been surrounded by music but I needed to make a break away from the family show for a while to find my own voice and....establish my own style. So I answered an ad in the Herald and joined a country outfit in Sydney for a while. You have to pay your dues. It's not an easy idiom and it's not just three chords. Country music is soulful and deep. To do it well you have to do it properly."

To do it properly you have to find something that is your own, which entails feeling your way, which in turn requires a definite creative courage. "Dad's audiences are very loyal to him and his music" she explained when he was still with us. "They took to me as part of the family. But, some of the songs I sang, they must have thought 'what the hell is she doing!?' Mum and dad were great, they let me find my own feet. I experimented with styles and did some pretty weird songs on the show. It took me a while to find where I wanted to take it and deal with the 'Slim Dusty's daughter' thing. I think I finally became accepted in my own right with *Out Of The Blue*.

Looking back on that long-unavailable album now, she muses as to why it is held in such high regard and is so sought out." It was such an important part of my musical journey," she concludes. "With the move away from EMI, my dad's label, to the ABC which was getting right into new Australian country music, I had something to prove, I was ready to do a mature album. It was important to me that I found my own musical voice - that I spread my wings. I had a sympathetic producer in Mark Moffatt and great support from Di Manson, the head of ABC Records at the time. I think it connected so well because the collection of songs were chosen very carefully to showcase my voice, particularly on the slow ballads such as 'A Bottle Of Wine And Patsy Cline—. As a singer I love sad songs, I love what you can put into a song to touch people. People also connected to the sentiment in the title track."

Craig Bauguley, editor of Britain's *Country Music People* magazine once told his readers "Unlike many of the starlets being pitched in Nashville, Anne is a unique stylist, instantly recognisable, aided by one of the sexiest voices around..... She has a wonderfully mellow voice as just about the sexiest little vibrato you're ever likely to hear. Indeed, it could be said that the new directions in country down under are invested with an

honesty not always visible in the formulaic, conveyor-belt product emanating from Nashville."

The natural tones and the empathy for the material, both old and new, which now so astounds reviewers and observers was forged in a crucible of fairgrounds, showgrounds, town halls and rodeos over decades. It was a musical life in which, when time allowed she continued to participate. " My career, unlike a lot of the young ones now, started with being born into the industry. Mum and dad's travelling show was in the old tradition, very much a variety show. I might not have always been ambitious because music was a way of life for me and I was happy to take it as it came. It really has been spread out, with lots of lumps and bumps."

Anne's albums *Down Home* (1974), *Let The Songs Keep Flowing Strong And Naturally* (1976), *Shoot The Moon* (1978), *Annie's Songs* (1980), *Merry-Go-Round Of Life* (1982), *Come Back Again* (1987), *Two Singers, One Song* (w/Slim Dusty, 1989), *Out Of The Blue* (1991), *Game Of Love* (1993), *Anne Kirkpatrick & Friends Live* (1995), *Cry Like A Man* (1997), *Travellin' Still, Always Will* (w/Slim Dusty, 2001), *Showman's Daughter* (2006), and (tracks on) *The Slim Dusty Family Reunion* (2008) while not quite coming near her father's 91 over 50 and beyond tally, constitutes a most admirable body of work, characterised by sweet vocals, accessibility, clean instrumentation and a deft choice of songs. They represent a gradual, comfortable evolution and her own light on the hill to aspiring female country performers ."

Anne's albums seem to tell her when they are ready for arrival, rather than the other way around. The most recent, the finely textured, creatively courageous *Showman's Daughter* drew together emotional threads - some raw, some resolved - from a tumultuous time in her life; a time which saw her lose a father and the nation lose an heroic figure. And also a cathartic time when she found a new clarity as a songwriter, resulting in some of her most vivid and affecting works and boding well for her future.

It was mother Joy who provided Slim with so many of his most memorable songs and who has been a key contributor to her daughter's albums since furnishing *One Day Blues* for *Down Home* thirty six years ago. Her most recent contribution is the heartfelt and evocatively dobro/accordion-laden *Peppimenarti Cradle*, which enabled Anne to sing about the cradle that Peppimenarti women from the Territory by the Moyle River made

for her to rest and protect her new-born babe - a long and slender construction of bold ochre colours that now sits atop her bookshelf. “The picture mum paints is so poetic” believes Anne, “she really is an inspiration to me”

Another inspiration, shaping the newest tracks on this painstakingly chosen collection, 18 months in the pipeline - which she has assembled to “run like a bracket, like a concert set” - is Bill Chambers, who co-wrote *Last Drive* with her and lent his seasoned voice to a fine version of Rodney Crowell’s *Here We Are*. “It was great fun because Bill and I found that we had so much in common. He’d also cut his teeth on all that early country rock stuff; he loved Gram Parsons as much as I did.” There’s lots of old friends gathered here, contributing in a variety of ways; songs from Bernie O’Brien, Allan Caswell, Gary Paige and Mark Holden, vocals from Bill, Troy Cassar-Daley, Genni Kane, Rosemary Rae, Alison McCallum, Janice Slater and Slim & Joy, and picking and playing by a brace of local luminaries who you’ll find credited elsewhere - all engendering the sort of warm family-ish environment that’s always been at the heart of Anne’s life, personal and professional.

There’s been myriad accolades along the way ---six Golden Guitars, a couple of Mo awards and, honouring *Out Of The Blue* as Best Country Album, a coveted ARIA Award (in a year when she edged out the top male stars of the day---Keith Urban, James Blundell, Graeme Connors and John Williamson). Early this year (2010) she became the 39th artist (since the great Tex Morton in 1976) to have been listed on the Australasian country Music Roll Of Renown—a physical monument on display at the Tamworth Regional Entertainment Centre.

In listening to this rich and rewarding collection of country, both traditional and progressive, one is taken and held in thrall by the artistry and, as I think I might have mentioned earlier, the creative courage. Australian music, not just Australian country music, has been graced by her achievements...to which there seems no end.

GLENN A BAKER *July 2010*