

Reviews for Little Red Wagon



This beautiful album straddles the line between blues and folk in a most satisfying way.

The superb guitarist and singer Elly Wininger – a 2014 inductee into the New York Blues Hall of Fame – wrote or co-wrote nine of the 13 tracks.

Two others, Down The Line and Wild Ox Moan, are traditional numbers. This is primarily an acoustic

album, featuring *expert finger picking and excellent slide*. Wininger is aided by the guitarist and producer Stephen Miller; their styles mesh perfectly. The playing is crystal clear. Wininger's fine vocals are far forward in the mix: You can actually make out the words. They cover a cornucopia of life's joys and travails. The Girl In The Tree House is a paean to the magic of childhood. For Fred, a slow, bluesy, finger picked number, celebrates the joys of taking chances. 'Thank you for getting me to dance/Thank you for getting me out on the floor,' Wininger sings. 'Thank you for getting me to dance/I'd forgotten that sometimes that's what music is for.' One of the finest cuts is the traditional number Wild Ox Moan. The stellar guitar arrangement is credited – and properly so – to Geoff Muldaur, who recorded it some years ago. This is country blues indeed. One of the bluesiest cuts is El's Kitchen, an instrumental on which the rhythmic guitar is accented by fiddle. And the title cut is a breakup song enhanced by slow, bluesy slide. Each song is distinct, yet the album forms a stylistic whole. Shade – 'I'm looking for mercy/looking for shade' -- features moving solos on slide guitar and electric organ. Hard Livin' is a fuller, almost poppier song with singers oohing in the background "It's hard living with a soft heart," Wininger sings. I Say Love is carries the warning that if you can't take the pain, you're not prepared for love. 'And will you walk in trust/Though your steps may be unsure?' Wininger asks. 'I say love.' *There's not a false note on the album. Every song's a gem.* Great listening for a lazy Sunday afternoon.

~M.D. Spenser

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The first time I heard Elly Wininger play guitar, it was in her duo with the folk/blues songwriter Dave Kearney. They traded meaty song after meaty song, from timeless to topical, and with a pretty dazzling command of their traditions: the fine shadings of period, place, idiom and variation. Folk lifers, I thought: playful, knowledgeable and reverent without sanctimony, with none of the affectations of authenticity that often send me scurrying to the bar when the bearded young bards of Brooklyn take the mic and define history as something that ended, for their purposes, in 1963. Nowhere was the effortless fluency more apparent than in Elly's nuanced, tricky and deeply rooted guitar-playing. I knew nothing of her story at this point: that she is a 2014 inductee into the New York Blues Hall of Fame; that her guitar teacher was David Bromberg (it shows); that she was offered a recording contract by New York City's Red Robin Records when she was 16 (her mother refused it); that she was a fixture on the NYC folk scene of her own less-storied generation, a Greenwich Village folk torchbearer and a serious practitioner long after *Look Magazine* had looked away from that first generation of bearded bards seduced by Delta blues and folk oracle. I just thought, "Shit, man, she can play." I'm kind of a genius like that.

Now I sit with *Little Red Wagon*, Elly Wininger's lovely, spirited and reflective solo album out now on Rabbit Hole Records. Traditional in instrumentation and in overall sound, and with plenty of rural blues and café folk reference throughout, *Little Red Wagon* yet delivers a stern warning about doctrinal traditionalism in its lead track. "Clarion River" is no folk trope at all, but a jazz-inflected smooth acoustic pop tune in the early-'70s mode of Joni and – especially – JT. Across the record's 13 tracks, Wininger defines folk music inclusively and globally, scoffs (implicitly, for Elly is a nice person and does very little explicit scoffing) at retro purism and specious folk/blues identity play. She can go as pure as you want, but she doesn't really see the point. In fact, at first at least, the rhythm of *Little Red Wagon* is one of an alternation in which non-folk excursions and fusions alternate with returns to home base and bedrock: "Clarion River" into the traditional "Down the Line"; the Afro-Cuban, watercolor jazz reminiscence of "The Girl in the Tree House" into the near-Chicago blues of "Shade" (penned by the wildly multifaceted Woodstock musician Kyle Esposito); the almost-show-tune/torch-song "For Fred" into the Cajun rocker "Two Steps Forward."

Wininger does not try to sound hip and world-weary, and thank God for that. She sounds "real" in a different way. The moment finds her looking back a lot through various musical and lyrical lenses, the confessional and the historical intertwining. But the voice remains a woman in the present: experienced and generous; on the whole positive and keeping the faith, but with plenty of challenges and falters; a little square at times, but she owns that honestly, too. And throughout, of course, everything is brought home again and again by her exquisite guitar-playing and that of co-producer Stephen Miller.

by John Burdick/ Woodstock Times/February 8, 2018

" You are a true triple threat.....A Songwriter, Vocalist and Slide Guitar Player!! Yikes!! Over The Moon!!" Margie & Art Corey/BMI

"I thought I'd spend time on the last snow day "catching up on my listening," so I broke out some of the CDs that were on my "to hear" list. I won't claim to have gotten that far--partly because (as is my wont) I started playing the same one or two almost obsessively. Anyway one of the day's favorites (and STILL in heavy rotation was Elly Wininger's most recent record, LITTLE RED WAGON--which, contrary to the old saying, scarcely needs any "fixing". Elly was inducted into the NYS Blues Hall of Fame a few years back, and deservedly so. But like so many other favorites of mine (including, say, Bonnie Raitt and Tracy Nelson), she is not limited to any one genre. As her self-penned liner notes indicate: "LITTLE RED WAGON is my interpretation and integration of the country blues, folk, a bit of Cajun, a touch of country, some R&B spice..." And I'd add some beautiful balladeering. I dare anyone to listen to her gorgeous and very moving, "For Fred" (which when I first heard her perform it live, I assumed was called "Thank You For Getting Me To Dance") and NOT choke up at least a little. Beautifully produced and packaged, with an extensively detailed booklet of lyrics, photos and notes, and featuring an array of talented musicians accompanying her (including back-up vocals by her fellow "Cupcakes," Janice Hardgrove Kollar and Lyndon Hardy, and THAT's a blend I'm always all too glad to hear). Too early in the year to announce my album of the year, but this will be in my Top 10 for her."

~Gregory Callahan, Music Curator, Hyde Park Library