



Old Yellow Moon

Emmylou Harris & Rodney Crowell

Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Produced by Brian Ahern for the Warner Music Company. 2013. CD. 41 minutes
12 songs. Rating: ***** 90% The cd comes with a twelve page booklet that
contains the complete lyrics and also photographs and production information.

All images are from the public domain

Old Yellow Moon combines the efforts of three great talents. Singers Emmylou Harris and Rodney Crowell have two of the most distinctive and effective voices in American music. Producer Brian Ahern, who has previously produced eleven albums with Emmylou Harris, has crafted another success with this work. *Old Yellow Moon* started when these three were sitting around a kitchen table at Ahern's home in Canada

, mucking around with the title track, which sounded good enough to record, and then other tracks followed piecemeal, with assorted songs coming under

consideration and being adapted from their older forms. The album was never a pre-planned concept album: no single theme emerges, and yet it is not an anthology of old hits either.



Although Harris and Crowell are both in their mid-sixties their voices, enthusiasm and energy levels do not show it. Hear the Rodney Crowell composition ‘Bluebird Wine’ as recorded in 1975 on Emmylou Harris’s *Pieces of the Sky* and compare it to the ‘Blueberry Wine’ version here. Spot the difference if you can – it is in the lyrics as Crowell changed two verses. Similarly Rodney Crowell’s voice here sounds little different to the way it appears on one of his first recorded Albums, 1980s *But What Will the Neighbors Think*.



Although some of the songs date from the seventies ('Dreaming My Dreams' 'Invitation to the Blues,' 'Bull Rider,' 'Bluebird Wine') and others are from the eighties and nineties, the album does not have a vintage feel to it. This may well be because several of the older tracks were little known and underrated. 'Spanish Dancer' is one such, dating from 1993. Others ('Back When We Were Beautiful' 'Here We Are' 'Old Yellow Moon') are concerned with being in the here and now and reflecting on the way things once were. That must be a sure way to make sure no vintage mood emerges. The mixture of songs also ensures that this cannot be a purely country album in the style that Harris, Ahern and Crowell released from the 1970s into the late 1990s. Several tracks ('Here We Are,' 'Hanging Up My Heart,' 'Open Season on My Heart,' 'Bluebird Wine,' 'Bull Rider') are in the Country and Western genre, but the duet 'Back When We Were Beautiful' resembles many of the songs that Harris has been releasing over the last decade. This works as a slower, more introspective song, without being maudlin and without the traditional country tempo and accompaniment. Similarly 'Spanish Dancer' also works in that same way, another introspective love song expressing a

woman's feelings for her attraction to a Spanish dancer. The duet 'Old Yellow Moon' with its slow waltz time, lyrics about recollection and fatalistic tones comes close to being an elegy for a wasted past, but the lyrics develop beyond that, becoming about still making a way down an unknown highway after having learned. Looking forward counters the initially elegiac mood. Totally different is the relentlessly fast paced 'Black Caffeine.' This bluesy-rock song can be taken as a sardonic satire of both the drug culture and the coffee culture. Coffee is the enslaving drug of choice and Harris sings in the persona of the coffee obsessive who makes overblown claims about her love for the drug.

Old Yellow Moon with its differing styles of country, blues-rock and romantic acoustic laments could have easily been jarring, but Ahern's skill as a producer holds the collection together and gives it both unity and contrast.

