



Bill Jackson

'The Wayside Ballads Vol 2'
(Laughing Outlaw Records)

A Biographical Essay by
Shane Howard – April 2016

I'm generalising of course but Australia doesn't have much respect for folk music.

Australia doesn't really have a folk tradition. Not like Ireland, England, Scotland, the rest of Europe or Asia or the Americas and Canada. It's as if the roots of our Settler culture haven't gone deep enough yet, in this ancient, Aboriginal landscape, for us to trust our own voice.

We respect other people's folk music, but at home we consider it indifferently. We fall over ourselves for the inane and the banal that gets packaged and sold to us from the larger, commercial, cultural imperialists.

Real music is rock, or schmaltz or alternative or punk or classical and there's a little room left over for folk, which is then relegated to generic labelling in with World, Roots and Blues. There are whole industries based around these genres, but folk is considered as if it were something that amateurs do on the weekends and not worthy of much attention or support. The ARIA awards, for example, have no folk category. "I close my eyes and I wonder if everything's as hollow as it seems", sings Bob Dylan on 'Tryin' To Get To Heaven Before They Close The Door'.

Bill Jackson is out there fighting the good fight and he's been doing it for a long time. He's a true folkie, in the Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Joan Baez tradition, reminding us of our better selves, prompting our conscience and reminding us to give a damn about the unconscionable shit that's happening in our world. Once the balladeers were the media, traveling from town to town, village to village, carrying the news. Bill's comes from the same mould and is cut from the same cloth.

Jackson does this by marrying compelling melodies and fine musicianship to clever, witty, poignant lyrics that never underestimate the intelligence of his audience.

There is no iTunes category for the type of music Bill Jackson creates and performs. It's not just folk, or country, or Americana, or blues, yet it contains elements of all those genres. But you're not likely to hear Bill on mainstream radio anytime soon.

Undaunted, Bill continues on, touring and recording, garnering fans across the country, constantly winning new audiences in Australia, the USA and beyond. Of course he wants people to like his songs but he's not about to sell himself short for a popularity contest. He's coming from the grass roots, from the ground up, from the struggle of the 99%, who have to put up with the deceit and conceit of the kingdoms and corporations. His songs are gritty and real and come at you like a hammer, ringin' in the mornin'. Take it or leave it, he's telling it straight up.