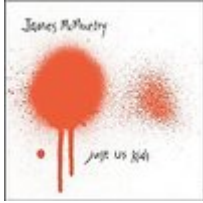


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James McMurtry -- Childish Things



James McMurtry

Just Us Kids

Lightning Rod Records

By Al Kaufman

If Bruce Springsteen had grown up in Texas, and not become a disgustingly rich superstar, he would have been James McMurtry. McMurtry knows his way around a six-string, and he sings of people who are disillusioned, on the fringe, growing older, and just trying to get by. His characters are not always good people, but they are always real people, due to McMurtry's extraordinary storytelling abilities.

In 2005, McMurtry made the foray into political music with "We Can't Make It Here," off of *Childish Things*. Both the single and CD won the 2006 Americana Music Awards for best song and album, respectively, and McMurtry, long a critic's darling, garnered the best critical acclaim of his then 8-CD career.

Just Us Kids is even better. Through his honeyed, world-weary voice, McMurtry gives us more people struggling to eke out an existence. He also gets even more political. "God Bless America" is basically a sequel to "We Can't Make It Here." McMurtry, over huge, fuzzy guitars, again points out the huge discrepancies between the rich and the rest of us. He then follows that up with "Cheney's Toy," a rather self-explanatory title. Yet McMurtry intersperses his chides of W with stories of soldiers who have become crazy or injured. But, wow, just in case one couldn't determine it from the title, the shots at Bush are relentless and ruthless.

You're the man, show them what you're made of

You're no longer daddy's boy.

You're the man that they're all afraid of

But you're only Cheney's toy.

McMurtry spews bile while maintaining melody. Of the hundreds of anti-Bush songs that have cropped up as of late, it is by far the most satisfying.

That he follows his political one-two punch with the CD's lightest song, the barroom rocker "Freeway View," only adds to their depth. For its part, "Freeway View," with Faces founder Ian McLagan's rollicking piano, adds some much needed levity. It's easy to forget that McMurtry is, first and foremost, a guy who just likes to play music.

"Freeway View" reminds the listener of that.

The self-produced *Just Us Kids* is the first release for the new Lightning Rod Records.

The label's president, Logan Rogers, worked with McMurtry on his last two releases for

Compadre Records and decided he could think of nobody better with which to launch a new label. He made a wise choice. Thus far in 2008, no CD has been better.