

STILL LIVE COLIN LINDEN

For Immediate Release
Fall 2012

NEW ALBUM BY RENOWNED ROOTS/BLUES GUITARIST COLIN LINDEN

It's been said that studio albums are artistic statements; live recordings are self-portraits. **Colin Linden's *Still Live***, released by Yellow Dog Records on October 9, 2012, is an epic autobiography, a tale of two countries and a multitude of genres, all rendered with complete commitment, total mastery and an infectious enthusiasm that reminds us all just why we fell in love with this music in the first place.

In his native Canada, Colin is a certified legend, a producer-guitarist-songwriter and bandmember extraordinaire, a man who has toured, produced and/or recorded with the biggest names in Canadian roots and blues, from Bruce Cockburn to Colin James to Linden's own iconic band Blackie & The Rodeo Kings. If there was a genre called "Canadiana," Colin would be its King. Or at least Prime Minister.

But south of the border, he's a fresh face on the blues and Americana scenes, even though he's been laying the groundwork for conquering the States for the past decade or so. He wrote one of the best songs recorded by Levon Helm and the reunited Band, "Remedy," at once capturing and updating that pioneering group's classic downhome shuffle. ***O Brother Where Art Thou*** is known for revitalizing bluegrass and old-time music, but Colin was there, representing the Delta blues with Chris Thomas King. Colin showcased that sound with the sold-out arena concert spinoff, ***Down From the Mountain***, appearing on the best-selling live album and DVD alongside such luminaries as Emmylou Harris (with whom he later did a stint as lead guitarist), Del McCoury and Alison Krauss. *O Brother* music producer T-Bone Burnett liked Linden's sound so much he enlisted him for numerous projects including albums by Gregg Allman, Robert Plant & Alison Krauss, and Diana Krall, as well as film projects including ***The Hunger Games*** and *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*. Colin's also produced and recorded with a Who's Who of the finest female voices of our time, including gospel-soul great Mavis Staples, jazz innovator Cassandra Wilson and Americana goddess Lucinda Williams.

The same gifts that make him such an in-demand first-call producer and guitarist fill the 12 songs of *Still Live*. He opens with his concert favorite "Big Mouth," a self-deprecating comic lament, before going all the way back to his earliest blues mentor, Howlin' Wolf (whom Colin met at the tender age of 11), for the menacing blues mambo, "Who's Been Talking." That tribute is the only cover on the 12-song CD.

One thing that really sets Colin apart from the blues pack is that he picks with his fingers, allowing a richer palette of harmony. As Piedmont blues great Rev. Gary Davis once said of his own two-finger picking approach, it's like a three handed pianist - the left hand plays chords, the right thumb plays the bass parts and the forefinger handles the melody. Colin can spin out fluid single-string solos with the best of them, but his ace in the hole is his five-finger picking. Mixing rich chords with moving harmonies he can sound like a one-man orchestra, as he shows in "Smoke 'Em All," a tribute to his late friend and longtime musical associate, keyboardist Richard Bell. Colin's

playing lives up to the title of the solo piece, pumping a steady bass line with his thumb as his left hand blazes through the fretboard fast enough to leave it a smoldering ruin. He follows that with “Sugar Mine,” changing gears to a band setting, opening with jaw-droppingly beautiful unaccompanied slide guitar. His style stands comparison to the best of Ry Cooder and Sonny Landreth, at once deeply bluesy but with an expanded emotional range and melodic vocabulary rarely heard in a slide setting. This guy is a player’s player. But his time on the other side of the studio glass has given him the taste and restraint of a great producer, that sixth sense that focuses every line, every lick, in service to the song, advancing the mood, enhancing the lyrics.

Still Live was recorded at Douglas Corner Cafe, a resolutely untrendy neighborhood Nashville bar that’s long been a showcase for blues, roots and singer-songwriters, three communities in which Colin is equally at home. He’s dependably backed by his Toronto pals John Dymond (bass) and Gary Craig (drums) as he opens with the grooving “Big Mouth,” tossing in Tommy Johnson’s “Big Road Blues” lick into one dazzling solo just to make sure we’re paying attention. On “Who’s Been Talking,” he features the album’s only guest, legendary Memphis/Muscle Shoals songwriter/keyboardist Spooner Oldham. Colin’s spiritual side is shown on the uplifting “Between the Darkness and the Light of Day,” his unique guitar style sounding like a six-string choir behind his warm vocals.

He follows that with his stunning guitar showcase “Smoke ‘Em All,” but the most revealing moments are heard between those two tracks, first when Colin simply acknowledges the crowd. Every musician tosses off that “Thanks,” usually with as much thought as taking a sip of water. But listen close to Colin’s voice and you hear genuine gratitude at being able to play his music in front of an appreciative audience. Then it’s “Allllll-right, here we go!” as he lights up “Smoke Em All,” and his pure joy and excitement at making music just jumps out and grabs you. After all this time, he still never takes any of it for granted.

“Sugar Mine,” displays his slide mastery, combining the eerie mystery of Blind Willie Johnson’s gospel-blues with modern electric textures, framing a love song balancing the sensual and spiritual.

He includes his rocking take on his own composition “Remedy,” and while it’s hard to forget Levon Helm’s soulful rasp in The Band’s classic version, Colin makes the song his own once again.

“John Lennon in New Orleans,” despite its title, never mentions the rock legend. Instead it’s a soulful stroll that’s both Crescent City travelogue and a universal song of loneliness. *Still Live* moves from that sad-yet-comforting slow dance into the edgy groove of “From the Water.” It’s bluesy, it’s rocking and it simply doesn’t sound like anyone else. Too many artists do roots and blues albums that are “original” in name only, and anyone with a decent record collection and memory to match can figure out which old song every one of those “originals” are modeled after. You can’t do that with Colin Linden.

But of course, Colin’s music is deeply rooted in traditional blues, soul and roots rock. It’s just that his years on the road playing everywhere with everyone have given him a mastery of that roots vocabulary that allows him to make deeply personal statements in that language. So while his ode to the healing power of love, “Dark Night of the Soul,” is framed by classic soul ballad guitar work, it never sounds like he simply rewrote another song.

“Still Live” closes with Colin turning up the heat for the ramshackle rocker “Too Late to Holler,” burning though some deep-fried slide over lurching rhythms before heading into the comforting shuffle of “I Give Up,” as his slide guitar takes us home, gliding over Spooner Oldham’s soulful organ grooves.

If *Still Live* is a self-portrait of Colin Linden, you couldn't come up with a better image than the gig-worn '57 Fender Deluxe that graces the cover. Like that trusty tweed amp (the same one used on his first live album 30 years ago), Colin's been down the road more than a few times, but he just keeps sounding better and when he really gets going, he burns white hot.

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