

April 7, 2010

For those that follow the regional folk/songwriter circuit, here's the least surprising sentence of 2010: Ken Will Morton's got a new record out. Here's the second least surprising: **True Grit**, the newest product from the Athens, Ga. workaholic, is yet another satisfying step forward in the catalog from which fans are quickly expecting nothing less.

Even more so than at any point in his lengthy discography, **True Grit** finds Morton dutifully and respectfully playing the part of a Neil Young/Tom Waits hybrid, understanding full well the concept of putting the focus back on the great American (and Americana) tradition of story-first in his songwriting. Not a distant second in this instance is the impeccable production quality of the most polished record Morton has enjoyed to date – something that, while not critical in establishing the record's validity, serves as an able-bodied platform on which to carry Morton's soulful stories to heights perhaps thus far unrealized in his career.

Sonically, **True Grit** is a bit of a quiet riot in comparison to some of Morton's earlier work (if a road map is needed, don't overlook the gravely title track and overall standout "Don't Feel Bad For Crying"). But by it's end, we're left with an even keeled record of mostly soft-side and muted tales that, while they may play more quietly than earlier work, may do nothing less than become his loudest critical success yet.

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Classic Americana that keeps and restores the faith

Ken Will Morton opens his account with the driving title track, a hymning of those who have, indeed, true grit. It's a fine slice of rootsy Americana which he follows up with "Gamblin' Man's Blues," a frankly ridiculously hooky more of the same. It's a standard many would struggle to sustain across a dozen tracks but Morton does, and then some. His vocals have something of Steve Earle's nasal resignation, his songs something of early Ryan Adams and his tunes something of the effortless country rock of the Seventies, only with rather more balls. Classic guitar solos, mourning and regret, all the classic themes are here but in Morton's hands they sound fresh and vigorous, not tired and hackneyed.

There's nothing desperately original or genre-defining here. What there is is the sort of Americana that gives you hope that, after listening to a million bands play a million Neil/Gram/Steve licks and songs that there is still something about the form that, in the right hands, can excite and inspire. Morton has those hands: listen, be reborn and remember why you liked this music in the first place.

Date review added: Thursday, May 13, 2010

Reviewers Rating: 8 out of 10