



NEW RELEASE

BLACK HEN MUSIC

Steve Dawson Nightshade

Over the past decade or so **Steve Dawson** has become such an indelible fixture on the Canadian musical landscape that it's tempting to take him for granted. One of the drawbacks of being so talented is that Dawson makes everything he does sound so effortless. The music that continually flows out of him is so natural and unforced that it's possible to forget all of the toil that went into producing it. Behind the organic, flowing guitar work, the crisp arrangements and the laconic singing voice, resides one of the brightest, hardest working musicians the country has ever produced.

In addition to working on his own music, he's kept very busy producing memorable albums by such luminaries as **Jim Byrnes**, **Kelly Joe Phelps**, **Old Man Luedecke**, **The Sojourners**, and **The Deep Dark Woods**, as well as bringing the award winning **Mississippi Sheiks Tribute Project** to fruition. Add to that his session work and touring commitments and it's amazing that this 2-time Juno award winning artist (not to mention 3 other **Junos** for his production work!) ever finds the time to create any new work under his own name.

Because Dawson is such a diverse artist, you're never quite sure what kind of mood he'll be in when he finally makes it into the studio to record. A master of many genres from gentle acoustic ditties and gut bucket blues through to free flowing experimental compositions, Dawson is comfortable in almost any musical setting you could name, and his newest album, "**Nightshade**" draws from these many interests to form his most satisfyingly complete album to date.

Though "**Nightshade**" continues in the vein of his four previous solo recordings, it nevertheless expands upon the language of his guitar work and offers more complex and fully realized songs than ever before. The riveting "**Darker Still**" sets the direction and mood as listeners encounter Steve Dawson, storyteller and chronicler of the dark side of life. Only on "**Gulf Coast Bay**", an old Mississippi Sheiks tune reprised from the tribute concerts of last year, are listeners offered a moment of brightness as Dawson's tropical slide guitar shimmers its way through this memorable track.

When questioned about the challenging lyrical content, Dawson responds, "I read dark stuff, watch dark movies and am drawn to that kind of subject matter. As far as musical influences, I count **Joe Henry** and **Elliot Smith** as a direct influence on my writing. Their music is dark, but for myself, I don't feel that dark as a person. Maybe writing music like this is a way to get it out of my system."

Whatever therapeutic function creating the songs on "**Nightshade**" may have had for Steve, it's his audience that benefits the most. And Dawson's guitar is, as always, at the forefront, as the instrumental work on "**Nightshade**" is certainly the most nuanced and gut-wrenching of his career. From the Weissenborn that drives "**Fairweather Friends**" to the pedal steel that defines "**We Still Won the War**", "**Nightshade**", like all of Dawson's recordings, offers a veritable musical feast for string aficionados. Banjos dance through "**Side of the Road**" (a song that was inspired by the life of bluesman Skip James), and snatches of acoustic melodies can be heard from time to time, but given the serious tone of many of the songs, Dawson wisely opted for a harder more electric sound this time out, and the results certainly speak for themselves as his instrument channels the likes of **Duane Allman**, **Jimi Hendrix**, **Ry Cooder**, and **Marc Ribot** to eloquently express the desperate emotions suggested by many of the lyrics.

As always, Steve Dawson has brought in some of the best players in the business to back him up. **Chris Gestrin** (keys) **Keith Lowe** (bass) and **Geoff Hicks** (drums) lock in from the first note to sympathetically complement the twists and turns posed by this challenging music. Acclaimed singers **Jill Barber**, **Jeanne Tolmie** and **Alice Dawson** provide a sweet counterpoint to the songs' dark edges to elevate the whole proceedings and round out what may be the finest album Dawson has ever created.

"**Nightshade**" represents a significant leap forward for Steve Dawson and is destined to become one of the most admired and well loved albums in an already impressive body of work.

"Mr. Dawson is the T-Bone Burnett of Canada..." — *No Depression Magazine*

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