



OBLIQSOUND ANNOUNCES THE RELEASE OF JOHN SHANNON'S DEBUT SOLO ALBUM, AMERICAN MYSTIC, APRIL 15, 2008

For those who know John Shannon through his collaborations with such diverse cutting-edge artists as Sonya Kitchell, Pyeng Threadgill, Hiromi and Haale—and through his own evolutionary instrumental group Waking Vision—his debut solo album American Mystic is sure to be an ear-opener. Having earned a stellar reputation as a team player by injecting his sweeping, panoramic electric guitar vistas into everything from country rock to avant-garde jazz, John Shannon now displays several hitherto unexplored facets of his considerable talent: modern solo folk singer, songwriter and vocalist with a delicate, virtuosic touch on acoustic guitar. American Mystic releases on ObliqSound in USA and Canada on April 15, 2008, with worldwide release to follow.

Shannon has always followed his muse, and despite the surprise element of hearing him create in such a different setting, American Mystic is a natural progression. "It's all led up to this point in time," John says about the album. "Being a solo artist means exploring music on your own terms. You can ride the music wherever you want to go or wherever it takes you."

Throughout American Mystic's 10 songs, the intimacy and universality of Shannon's songwriting is exposed via his feather-light whisper of a voice. He toys with the timing in his phrasing so that a word might arrive after a slight delay or be extended into the next chord change, and his intricate, closely miked, layered guitar lines—largely acoustic, with some electric guitar texturing—wrap around and complement those words, merging with them seamlessly. His ethereal, contemplative songs are one-on-one, personal narratives. Beginning with "Forgiveness," the album's opening track, Shannon sets up a template that he continues to explore more deeply with each new song as the album unfolds. Themes are often carried from one part of the album to another, his words and guitar intertwining, tying together John's own experiences and observations to mankind's interactions with nature, the universe and fellow human beings.

Those familiar with Shannon's stellar electric guitar work as an accompanist and with Waking Vision will agree that American Mystic's meditative songcraft and spellbinding acoustic finger-picking guitar mark a new musical exploration. Shannon describes his solo music as song journeying, "embarking on an inner experience with the music as my guide." Nearly all of the sounds heard on American Mystic come from Shannon, other than background vocals from Caroline McMahon and a hint of upright bass and cello.

Shannon describes his modern folk compositions as "earth music," and sees them not as individual statements but as part of a larger picture that incorporates a sizable healing and spiritual component. In a sense, American Mystic is a concept album, though each listener will likely interpret it differently. "I am drawn to the idea of all my songs being smaller parts of one big song," John says. "The most important part of songwriting for me is that I get out into nature and have a real experience with the purity of the earth, so that experience comes through me later as a song. This mysticism is key to all of my music."

In "Somewhere," for example, Shannon sings, "I'll rise with the lion's mane/ in the sunlight you know my name,/ dreams will come, dreams will go, they will carry me to my home." Three songs later, the concept is expounded upon again in the track called "Lion's Mane," in which he sings, "I'll rise on the lion's mane tonight/ I will pull the weight the oxen pulls into the night/ I'll stare with the eagle glare tonight/ I will dream the dreams forgiveness brings into the light." Those lines slingshot us back to where we started, with "Forgiveness," and so on throughout American Mystic.

The album's producer and ObliqSound owner Michele Locatelli agrees with Shannon's self-assessment. "American Mystic is not just a collection of songs," he says. "It's an entire song in 10

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different parts, all in reference to each other. There's great consistency and integrity in both the melodic and harmonic idiom but also in the lyrics and in the significance of the songs. Apart from the different arrangements that we developed together combining guitars and cello and upright bass, John expresses himself with a simple combination of voice and custom-tuned acoustic guitar which is reminiscent of music usually referred to as folk."

If there is one obvious commonality between American Mystic and Shannon's prior electric work, it's the sense of freedom and adventure he brings to it. Around each turn is another surprise. "I come from an improvisation background as a musician," John says. "My favorite music is totally free of traditional form. In the American Mystic music, from performance to performance, whether in the studio or on stage, everything is open to change or evolves from the last time. I don't put a lock-down on anything I do. Lyrics may change, tempos may morph, form may alter. So on the record what you hear is a one-time take."

Thanks to close friend and drummer Ferenc Nemeth (Gilfema/Lionel Loueke Trio), John Shannon came to the attention of Locatelli, who felt that Shannon's music would be a natural fit for the label. "John is one of those artists that's hard to fit in a category," he says. "He has developed an identity that incorporates elements of different traditions with a very solid musicianship (something that all ObliqSound artists have in common) and an emotional intensity that comes from his endless desire to find truth. American Mystic perfectly fits my vision of music that surpasses music classification and labeling, and touches both the trained musician as well as the passionate listener."

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