



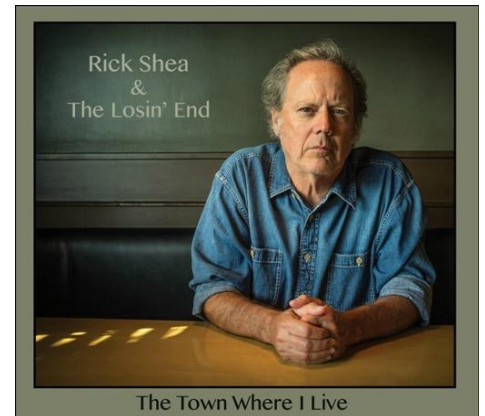
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## Penny Black Music UK

**Rick Shea & The Losin' End The Town Where I Live**

**Reviewed By: Malcolm Carter Date Published: 15/04/2018**

Dave Alvin is quoted as saying that Rick Shea is “an incredible and intelligent musician and songwriter with an angelic voice that I’d kill for,” while Shea reckons he comes from “the Dave Alvin school of folk music.” ‘The Town Where I Live’ is Shea’s eleventh album and if Dave Alvin, whom Shea has played with as guitarist, rates him so highly then it’s recommendation enough. By Shea’s own admission this album is “more of a band album than I’ve been able to make in the past,” and, although Shea handles the vocals, acoustic and electric guitar, pedal steel, mandolin and dobro himself, the contributions from The Losin’ End should not be underestimated. Stephen Patt also plays electric guitar, along with acoustic bass, accordion, baritone guitar and the all-important Hammond B3 while Dave Hall covers electric bass duties and the band is completed with Steve Mugalian on drums. There are a few diversions to this line up; Shawn Nourse takes the drum stool on ‘Guess Things Happen That Way’ while Claire Holley adds harmony vocals to ‘The Angel Mary and the Rounder Jim’ and Cindy Wasserman supplies background vocals on ‘Trouble Like This’.



The reason all involved get a name check is that, while the songs (bar a cover of Jack Clement’s ‘Guess Things Happen That Way’) are written by Shea and he could no doubt pull out more than acceptable versions of these songs, all on his own a major part of the attraction of the overall sound produced, is one of a band gelling together, especially on the title track. Some guys just sound right when they play together and Rick Shea and The Losin’ End fit that bill. The songs are, unsurprisingly, steeped in Americana. Apart from Shea’s vocals that are immediately engaging, it’s Shea’s story songs that set him apart from many of his contemporaries. The songs for the main part deal with small town America although it matters not where we are; we all feel lost, frustrated and that there’s a better life waiting somewhere. No matter if we live in small town America, in whatever parts of the UK where there’s still at least some green areas or out in the woods in parts of rural Europe, there’s always this feeling that we should break out, while in reality there’s probably no better life or times waiting to be had in this mythical place in our-mind.

The whole point is that, although Shea is singing about breaking out from his surroundings, at times they still sound attractive to those who are unlikely to ever step foot there. And that’s part of his songwriting skill. Shea can sing about leaving places we’ve never been to and make us yearn to be there. Shea more or less confirms this on the title track. He sings, “The town where I live/It is ragged and old/Too hot in the summer and the winters too cold/The day times are weary and the nighttime brings you down/You could waste your whole life in this ragged old town,” before his world-weary voice tells us of the problems finding work backed by pedal steel and accordion only to admit that if he did jump a train and leave he’d end up someplace where it all looked the same. True words and that’s another of Shea’s talents - he doesn’t sugar-coat those stories but keeps them real.

‘Goodbye to Alberta’ opens the album and it’s not the best song on the album and probably not the best choice to start the album. The accordion plays a major part (and is effectively used throughout the album) and while it’s not a bad song there are others that would have grabbed the listeners’ attention more than this track. As it is, it’s a fine slice of Americana that had it appeared half way through the album would have had more impact. The second song, the folky ‘The Road To Jericho’, for example, is a better indication of the talents of Shea, both lyrically and musically. Shea’s vocals are more heartfelt on this track and the backing colours in the spaces effectively. It’s more typical of Shea’s ability to write story-songs and more interesting just on that fact

alone. The playing on this track is absolutely outstanding and the production brings out the best in the song. While the following 'The Starkville Blues' is cut from completely different cloth musically, it's another winner. It has its roots in the early days when country met rock and roll, Shea's pedal steel is outstanding and the whole song rocks like there's no tomorrow. 'Hold On Jake' is flavoured by the honky-tonks where Shea cut his teeth and the press release has it spot on when mentioning that there are also Mexican influences scattered throughout some of these songs. While fairly subtle, it's enough to push Shea's work out of the mainstream and to attract him a wider audience. 'Trouble Like This' is simply gorgeous, a ballad where Shea's dark voice takes on even darker shades. For some reason Warren Zevon's last album comes to mind which can be no bad thing. There's the pure country of '(You're Gonna Miss Me) When I'm Gone', a rollicking tune that you just know is going to go down a storm with the audience when played live. 'The Angel Mary and the Rounder Jim' is another of Shea's excellent story songs, country fueled Americana that just draws the listener in, and it's further indication that Dave Alvin wasn't just being kind. Jack Clement's 'Guess Things Happen That Way' is lyrically at odds with the musical framework that Shea and the band have dressed the song in. The music is uplifting and gallops along but the lyrics about love lost are at odds with the music. Even so it's a fantastic version and shows that Shea is capable of shedding light on sadness. The closing song, the shuffling 'Sweet Little Mama', is underpinned by Patt's warm Hammond B3 and is another leaving song, but has an uplifting, warm flavour which coming at the end of the album does its job by leaving the listener wanting more.