
JIMMY DOWLING

BLESSING & CURSING

INDEPENDENT

country/folk/shanty

One only needs to take note of the calibre of collaborators that Jimmy Dowling attracts as quick proof of his talent as a musician. Dowling's last solo recording, *Common Lot*, featured Matt Walker, Garrett Costigan, Steve Hadley, Andy Baylor, Tony Hargeaves and more as backing musicians. Around the Northern NSW region, in which Dowling currently resides, he's often backed by top shelf local musos like Warren Earl, Matt Bone and Grant Gerathy. For Dowling's latest LP, he took up Matt Walker's offer to produce the recordings and again enlisted the likes of Walker, Hadley and Costigan, Grant Cummerford, Hamish Stuart, Roy Payne and the recently departed James Cruickshank to bring his woozy balladeering to life. These are associations he made living and playing in Melbourne. "I find it's the best, most direct route to musical friendships is to meet onstage," says Dowling, "cause you sort of get down to the nitty gritty of what you're doing."

With a deep passion for acoustic jazz, a thickly-consonanced, Chet Baker midnight voice, and a knack for distinctly Australian portraits, Dowling is a striking talent as a singer-songwriter. He's earned the odd Don Walker comparison and here he acknowledges The Don's powers by taking his 'Sweet Eyes' and turning it into a lilting waltz.

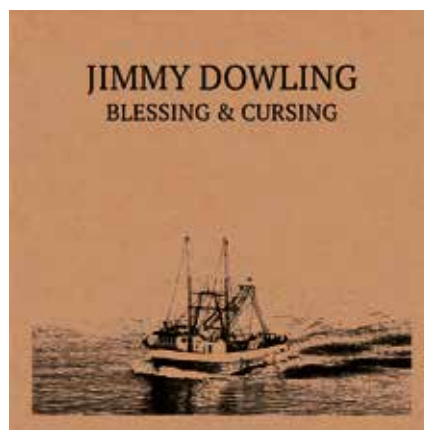
'Sweet Eyes' is the sole cover on a 15-track album whose genesis lays in a poem, 'The Death Of Les Darcy', by Peter Fenton. Dowling approached Fenton about the idea of setting his words about the famous Australian boxer to music and coaxed him into writing a couple of extra verses. Walker added the "prowling" (in Dowling's words) guitar and the recording was underway. The track pairs well with another tribute to a great Aussie sporting icon, Michael Peterson, a duet with The Cruel Sea's James Cruickshank, who passed away from cancer this month.

"Himself and I did the tribute to Michael Peterson," Dowling confirms. "I wrote the words and the melody and the chords and then came up with an idea based on the fact that I wanted to use surfing musicians to record it. He was just down the way and because he lived in the old rectory at St Kevin's, the oldies got him to play the organ at Mass. So he had access to that. So instead of using a bass in the song, I got him to play bass pedals on the pipe organ. And he came up with the guitar and a couple of other things."

There's also a song, 'Black Book', which features Cruickshank's 12-string guitar, stolen from a festival and then found in a pawn shop by Dave Graney. Then Dowling rediscovered a recording of a short organ piece played by Cruickshank and decided it should close the album, paired with a recording of howling wind.

The sea features prominently on *Blessing & Cursing*. Even beyond the more obvious references, like 'MP', 'Trawler', and 'Deckhand', there are constant references to the ocean.

"Yeah I used to work on the sea," Dowling confirms. "On commercial fishing boats. And I love surfing and just that magnetism that the ocean's got. Whether you're living by it, or living on it. Or living away from it and you're looking forward to going to it. You've got 'Fundy Mud', that's on the Bay of Fundy in Canada. And I wrote 'Parrots' there too. And there's a bit of Vancouver in it. There's quite a lot of Canada sprinkled through it. And there's 'Deckhand', which was the thought pattern of a deckhand. And whatever



that ocean does for your brain. If you think you think a lot on land, you think about three times more when you get out to sea. I don't know what it is about it but it's just what happens with me."

The sea also influences the music significantly. Much of it sounds like its struggling to maintain balance on sea legs, lurching and swaying, with pedal steel rolling through like waves, and everybody listening intently for the next change in weather. Some songs, like 'While I've Got Him Occupied', celebrate more upbeat, honkytonk forms, whilst others, the particularly affecting 'Leaden Heart' being a prime example, barely stir, relying on just acoustic guitar notes, Dowling's syrupy voice, and pedal steel and tin whistle intertwined in musical intercourse. Another standout, 'Rollin' Drums', was conceived during a day of manually removing the tops of steel barrel drums, the rhythm born of the hammer's beats. That's putting the roots back into roots music, right there! *Martin Jones*

Jimmy Dowling launches the album at the Mullum Music Festival, November 19-22.