

THE BARD CHORD: THE LATEST SPIN

by Jackie Morris

One of the most dynamic folk/blues albums of the decade, O LOVE by Ernest Troost combines mesmerizing lyrics with compelling grooves, beautiful melodies, and amazing musicianship. The album is positively addictive.

When talking about the talent of Ernest Troost, there is no such thing as overstatement. It begins with his exquisite command of every instrument he plays – a blend of passion and precision that infuses every note from his guitar (both acoustic and electric)...mandolin.... pump organ.... and occasional harmonica and bass. It continues with his memorably vivid lyrics – poetic and dramatic - in stories that ignite the imagination. And thanks to Troost’s clear, natural voice, not a word is lost.

Yet Troost’s genius does not end there. In *O LOVE*, Troost takes his trademark Piedmont Blues style and rocks it up a notch. It’s folk-rock meets country-roots meets blues, with a few heartfelt ballads thrown in for good measure. And running through this music like an underground river is a keen intelligence, a literate edge, a poet’s heart...and some instrumental hooks that just don’t quit. *In short, this album has it all.*

Ernest Troost has long been known for his “darker” songs – songs of crime and twisted passion – and *O LOVE* will not disappoint in this department. The opening track, *Old Screen Door*, is a riveting tale of childhood trauma, patricide and arson, including some of the most haunting imagery on the album. From the opening lines, “There was blood on the handrail, and some on the floor, This house was my home, but it ain’t no more,” to the closing line, “And the moon glows crimson through the old screen door,” the song grabs you and won’t let go, building to a powerful crescendo like a good novel.

But primarily, the album lives up to its name. The title track, *O Love*, is all about the all-consuming power of love – its power to devastate (“O Love, left me a broke and hollow frame / Well I don’t feel a thing, but I cannot bear the pain”) as well as to redeem (“O Love, don’t turn your back on me now”).

Still other songs show the true, softer side of this Emmy Award-winning composer-turned-singer-songwriter. The song *Close*, for example, is one of the most authentic love songs I have ever heard. It celebrates the need for space in any meaningful relationship, as Troost says appreciatively to his lover: “You give me space, where I can try to find myself in this big empty place” and concludes with the line, “And all this room you give me makes us close.”

Another standout song is the touching, traditional-sounding *Harlan County Boys*, which deals with familial love. It sounds like an old classic – a song about a simple mountain woman’s enduring strength through love for her husband and sons, even in the face of tragedy.

And finally, as a fitting conclusion to this collection, there is *The Last Lullaby*, a tender tribute to the memory of a very special friend (inspired a few years ago by the untimely death of folk-rock legend, Kenny Edwards).

These are just a few examples of the songs on *O LOVE*. But I really must emphasize that **EVERY SINGLE TRACK ON THIS ALBUM IS WONDERFUL.**

I also should point out that *O LOVE* is graced by other major talents. Among them, Nicole Gordon provides exquisite harmony vocals on the majority of tracks; Mark “Pocket” Goldberg adds rock-solid rhythm on electric bass; and Dave Stone provides some lovely upright bass on the softer songs. Seven of the eleven tracks also include drums....tastefully played by Ralph Humphrey or Steve Mugalian. Plus, there’s Charlie Bisharat on fiddle on two songs, and Debra Dobkin on percussion on one. The end result leads me back to where I began: *O LOVE* is one of the most dynamic folk-blues albums of the decade.

You can check it out for yourself (and buy it) on CDBaby.com. If you’re like me, you’ll want to hear it again and again.