

## LEYLA FENCES Itty Bitty Twang Twang

★★★★★



*Get The Truck Outta Here / Something Right / Pretty Lies / What I Do / Too Far Gone / The Next Time / How Things Have Changed / One More Honky Tonk / I Wonder / I'll Stop My Whining / Pain Relief / The Cards / Trophy Wife / We'll Just Figure It Out / Get The Truck Outta Here (Karaoke Version)*

Producers: Paul Osborn and Leyla Fences

**Self release**

47:58

Leyla Fences is a new name to me, but this is her second CD. What I'd like to know is how on earth I missed her first? Especially with a title like *Liars, Cheats & Fools*. For that matter, *Itty Bitty Twang Twang* as a title doesn't go about misleading the listener in any way.

Leyla is a Texas-born singer and songwriter currently based in Nashville but moving to Austin this summer. She falls firmly into the modern honky tonk gal category, and she has either written or co-written all the tracks here (mainly "written") and crikey is she impressive.

With a ballsy voice which reminded me a little of Terri Clark, and a heap of feistiness, Leyla Fences thinks that what she hears on mainstream country radio these days doesn't sound like country music anymore. She has also seemingly experienced enough heartbreak to write some

proper country songs (she doesn't relate to the fairy-tale happy endings of so many contemporary songs either) with just the right amount of tongue-in-cheek bitterness and life observations in her songs. And mighty strong the songs are too. *Too Far Gone* sounds like a hit record in just about anybody's hands, and would work on radio even now, but the majority of the tracks would probably have had the likes of Patty Loveless when she was *Thinking About Elvis*, or Pam Tillis when she was *Cleopatra, Queen Of Denial* fighting over them, which is not only hugely complimentary to her writing, but just fine by me.

I absolutely loved *Something Right*, with its "I must have done some amazing Mother Teresa-like deeds" line in the chorus, and *What I Do* is just about as perfect an example of how a contemporary country song should sound as you could wish for, despite having too much fiddle and steel for modern day Music Row.

Among the other highlights is the swayer, *The Next Time*, the fabulous two-stepper, *One More Honky Tonk* ("and I'll be over you") complete with an Alan Jackson reference, the stone country of *The Cards*, which ingeniously likens a dying relationship to a game of poker (and is fantastic by the way), and *Trophy Wife*, about a guy keeping his trophy wife "underweight, under-thumb, and under the knife", but *Itty Bitty Twang Twang* is a filler-free zone.

I'm guessing that *Get The Truck Outta Here* is something of live favourite due to the inclusion of an additional Karaoke version as the closing track and I can just hear a crowd singing along with the f-word instead of the t-word, but I'm not sure its inclusion (the Karaoke version) was really necessary.

This is the kind of record

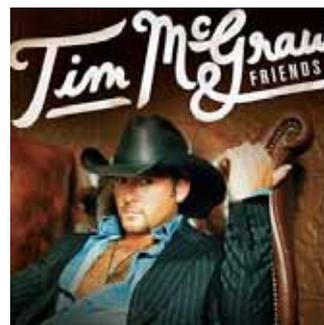
we all hoped Sara Evans, Sunny Sweeney, and Chely Wright would end up making before getting caught up in the Nashville hit machine and going all pop on us. Sadly therefore, I won't hold my breath for Leyla Fences securing a major label deal any time soon, but if I ruled the world I'd sign her in a heartbeat. She is a major talent, a great songwriter, and this is an album not to be missed.

Duncan Warwick

## TIM MCGRAW & FRIENDS

Tim McGraw & Friends

★★★



*Sail On / Twisted / Owe Them More Than That / Me and Tennessee / Middle Age Crazy / Can't Hurt A Man / Find Out Who Your Friends Are / Cold, Cold Heart / Milk Cow Blues / Bring On The Rain / It's Your Love*

Producer: various

**Curb Records**

44:41

There is a strong element of predictability about this release, and a touch of disappointment too.

Tim McGraw's dispute with Curb records has been a well publicised and long drawn out affair which still rumbles on; and despite Tim obtaining a court ruling which allows him to release new product through Big Machine most people who know the industry would have bet their houses on Curb bungling out a

spoiler to coincide with that first release on his new label. Not, it seems, being in possession of any new material Curb have had to fall back on the reciprocal agreements for a bunch of past duets which have, mostly, been on other artists albums.

So we have Tim and Lionel from *Tuskegee*, we have Tim and Gwyneth from *Country Strong*, we have Tim and Randy Travis from Randy's *25th Anniversary* album and so on, the other halves of the deals which allowed Tim to appear "by courtesy of" in the first instance. Some of the tracks are timeless and will stand this re-issue as well as perhaps one or two more in decades to come, *Bring On The Rain* with Jo Dee Messina and the classic *It's Your Love* with Faith Hill being prime examples. The version of *Owe Them More Than That* with Kenny Rogers is about as pure old school country as you can get and an absolute joy.

Unfortunately (or for the conspiracy theorists perhaps deliberately) there are couple of dogs on here too. *Middle Age Crazy* is a good song but this version with Jerry Lee Lewis and record producer Jon Brion achieved little other than making me want to reach for an old Jerry Lee CD to remind myself how good The Killer used to be. *Milk Cow Blues* with Ray Benson works well enough on the level of two friends having fun singing an old classic together but I am afraid *Cold, Cold Heart* with Tony Bennett reminded me of chucking out time at The Dog & Duck.

I doubt very much if Tim McGraw wanted this album to be released and I know very well he probably couldn't have stopped it if he tried. I wonder if anyone at Tim's old label got a key to the executive washroom for thinking this one up?

Chris Smith