

...the new releases

Shelby Lynne
TEARS, LIES AND ALIBIS

Everso Records EVER150

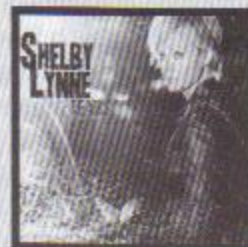
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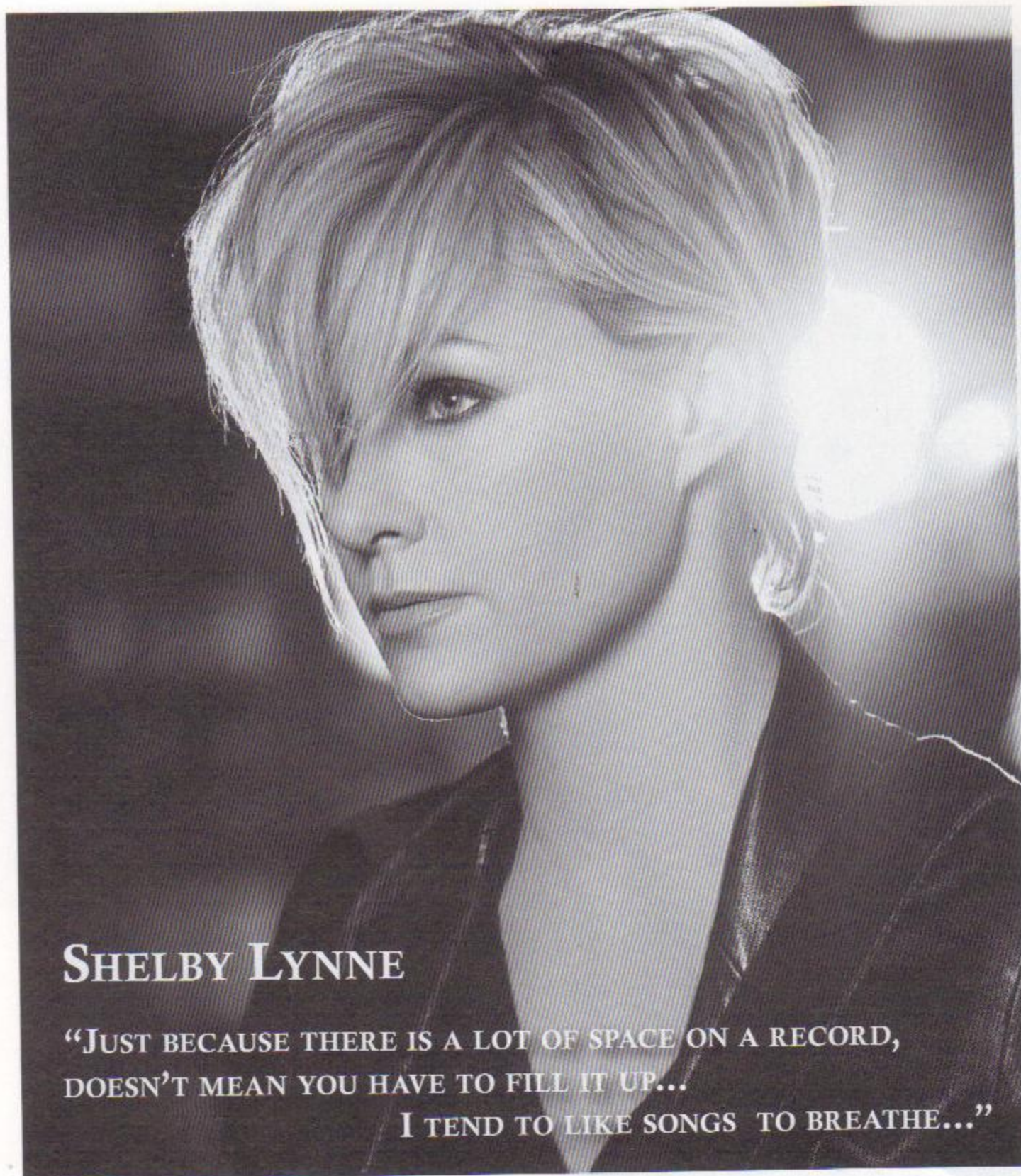
A fascinating collision via songs between what Shelby hopes will happen and what she's seen suggests will occur ...

The light-hearted jaunty *Rains Came* opener hardly prepares you for what is to follow on Shelby Lynne's self-produced and mainly home-recorded new album. It is mainly a dark, somewhat bleak collection of highly personal songs that explore the intricacies of life and relationships. It has to be said from the outset that this is not an easy album to listen to, but with more and more plays these well-written and superbly executed songs seep into your mindset and really get under the skin. *Loser Dreamer*, buried away as track seven is the lynch-pin that inspired and holds everything together. Initially it's hard to see any commercial value at all in this off-beat, lazy blues number with its hypnotic arrangement. Gradually the pieces fall into place and it takes on a semblance of sense, if still a bit ponderous. Possibly you have to be a 'loser dreamer' to get it, but musically and emotionally it is something of a minor classic.

Old # 7 is a bleak, dour drinking song all about a woman who has lost out in love, turned to the bottle and never found the kind of real happiness everyone searches for. Ben Peeler's haunting steel guitar hits the mark perfectly creating a desperate counterpoint to Shelby's harrowing vocal. Though there's a funky edginess to *Old Dog*, the lyrics and the vocal are still pretty bleak driven by an insistent acoustic guitar and rough vocal harmonies. There's a lighter moment with the free-and-easy vibe of *Something to be Said About Airstreams* but it's a brief interlude as she pulls no punches with *Family Tree* and the plaintive *Like A Fool*, which uses the 'what ifs' of love and life accompanied by a stripped-back arrangement and pained vocal—Mark Jordan's piano on this, brief and to the point, is a masterstroke. This album began with two stars and over a ten-day period has now ended up with four—by the time you read this, it might even have reached five. My advice: persevere with it because it just grows and grows in stature and impact. **AC**

www.shelbylynne.com





SHELBY LYNNE

"JUST BECAUSE THERE IS A LOT OF SPACE ON A RECORD,
DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO FILL IT UP..."

I TEND TO LIKE SONGS TO BREATHE..."

Over the past twenty-odd years Shelby Lynne has emerged from the on-going battles with the music industry a little bruised and battered, but hardly defeated. Since signing her first record deal as a nineteen year-old country singer with Epic in 1988 she has moved through a whole host of labels including Morgan Creek, Magnatone, Mercury, Island, Capitol and Lost Highway. Occasionally, to keep the record bosses happy, she's had to compromise her music, her image and her style, but there comes a time in your life and career that you just have to quit playing the game and do what you do best. With that in mind, Shelby has set up her own Everso Records and is now really taking control of her career.

Shelby's first self-released album, *TEARS, LIES & ALIBIS*, should have been released on Lost Highway, but the Nashville-based label bosses rejected it, telling her to go away and work with a big-name producer to give the album more commerciality. Tough, tenacious and unwavering in her determination, Shelby doesn't mince words in her condemnation of the major labels.

"They didn't want to spend the money that they thought it would take to make it more commercial," she explains on the

phone from her California home. "They wanted to bring in a top name producer to make it really slick and polished and I didn't want to do that. I wanted to leave it the way it was, and that's when I decided to go my own way."

Shelby Lynne is regarded as one hard woman. Well aware of her firebrand reputation, I trod carefully. She radiates unapproachability, the inevitable calluses built up from dealing with the music business accounts for part of that tough shield around her. Yet she came across very open and friendly willing to answer each of my questions with candour and honesty. Shelby has never consciously aimed her music at chart success or radio playlists, so why would a label like Lost Highway expect her to change and be moulded into something that they thought would be commercial.

"I think it has a lot to do with the *JUST A LITTLE LOVIN'* record," she says. "I had Phil Ramone who was the producer on that record, and they were really accustomed to having that name to go around. Record labels are cheap, desperate and nasty. They will do anything they can to sell a record, and they don't care what it takes, or whatever it sacrifices to the art. You know they just want big shiny polished names, that's what matters to them."

"So after I did *JUST A LITTLE LOVIN'* which was a great record and I love and adore it, there simply wasn't a big high budget for a producer for this one—which is why I wound up doing it on my own. I never really wanted to be a record producer it was just out of necessity I had to do that—there was no money for big named producers. So they're basically telling me what I played for them, and what I had, which wasn't finished, but well half-way finished, they didn't want to spend the money it would take to make it what they want. So I said: 'Fine I'm going to keep it like it is and just go my way.'"

It is general knowledge in the industry how difficult it is to get close to Shelby Lynne. In the past she's shunned interviews and been reluctant to pose for a newspaper photographer—she'd rather let her recordings tell her story than worry about image. It's an amusing irony given that her latest work, is one of the most intimate CDs you're likely to experience. Trying to pigeonhole her would be a losing proposition. She can sing jazz, blues, swing, and r&b, and rock a honky tonk with the best of them. She's changed her musical directions almost as often as she's changed her look, but this new self-produced album is a new experience for the petite, bleached blonde singer-songwriter—sitting in the producer's chair for the first time.

"It's been pretty easy ... I mean I have wrote the songs and I have an idea about how I want them to go. I guess the thing I have learnt about making records is to take the best of what I've learnt from the best producers in the world, which I've had the opportunity to work with several times, and don't over produce. If you have a good song and a good vocal, you can make a good record. I guess it's just a matter of bringing the right people to the party, and playing the right instruments, and knowing when to stop. Just because there is a lot of space on a record doesn't mean you have to fill it up with a bunch of noise. I tend to like songs to breathe and breathing in a record, as opposed to a load of clattery noise."

Shelby reveals in spades that her voice has no limitations when it comes to reaching for the margins in classic American music. She gives her gorgeous voice, acoustic guitar and savagely-honest songs room to breathe with sparse, but inventive arrangements that cut right through to the very soul of the listener.

"That kinda was my goal. I think that if you have something to say, and it's a strong enough message, then just get it out there. As long as it doesn't need a lot of flowering up or prettying up

then the listener can decide for their own, without having a lot of bombastic things going on. I mean there's a time for production and a time for not producing. So I've tried to really listen to my heart. It was really important for me when I worked on the record to be able to hear it enjoyably, you know comfortable on my ears."

The basic recordings were made in Shelby's home studio in Rancho Mirage, California then she added extra sweetening in Nashville blending in veteran players like Spooner Oldham, David Hood, and Kenny Malone with newer guys such as Brian Harrison, Val McCallum, Ben Peeler and Bryan Owings.

"I think you have to mix the old with the new," she enthuses. "There's a lot of great young players out there that understand the old way, but until you actually get into a room with David Hood, you really don't know how it's really done. My guitar-vocal tracks were already down, so they came in and played to my existing track, which in itself is difficult, but they are so amazing with a groove. David Hood on bass is just a monster. I mean you can't even believe how this cool normal looking cat comes in with this Fender Pix 55 bass guitar and just gets in a groove and you go: 'Oh my god I can relax.' It's just amazing how he makes a record a record. So I'm really lucky. It's the first time I've been able to work with David and Spooner, I've known them a while but never worked with them. It's perfect because after I'd finished recording in California, I went to Nashville to finish recording and they just lived down the road in Alabama. They came up for the weekend, so we just drank some wine, smoked some weed and made a record. It was fun!"

Shelby was born and raised in Alabama. She was signed to her first record contract by legendary producer Billy Sherrill and he had worked in the studio back in the late 1960s with both Spooner and David on recordings by Charlie Rich, Bob Luman and Tammy Wynette. She has long been a big fan of Billy Sherrill, having grown up on the classic country recordings that he had produced, and earlier this year she got to be involved in Billy Sherrill's induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame.



"He's from Alabama too, he comes from that part of the woods. Without Billy Sherrill I wouldn't be here talking to you today. I'm totally grateful to him. He's a great friend, and I admire him as a person. He makes me laugh—he's hilarious. It was great to see him again. I hadn't seen him in a while until I went back for that. I sang *Stand by Your Man*, the Tammy Wynette song. Wonderful!"

Shelby continues her connection with legendary music figures of the Deep South as one of the many guest performers on the new Jerry Lee Lewis album, *MEAN OLD MAN*. Produced by Steve Bing it features a mix of old classics and new songs with 75 year-old Jerry Lee dueting with Mick Jagger, Solomon Burke, John Fogerty, Gillian Welch, Willie Nelson, Tim McGraw, Merle Haggard and many more.

"Steve and I have been friends for years now and he asked me if I'd come by and sing on a couple of tracks, of course I would love anything to do with Jerry Lee. He's one of the last of the dying breed, so you have to take advantage of different opportunities. I met Jerry Lee once a couple of years ago, at a Farm Aid event, but you know I was glad to be a part of the project. He can still sing and play the

piano ... I guess he'll do that and die on a piano stool—that's what could happen."

Shelby sung a couple of duets with Jerry Lee—the old country classic *I'll Hold You In My Heart* and Kris Kristofferson's *Here Comes That Rainbow*. She's also been busy in the studio this summer recording her first Christmas album.

"I've just finished it and it will be out in October," she says. "I'm excited about it. It's traditional, Christmas songs and I wrote two originals. I was never given the opportunity on a major label to do a Christmas album, and I have some fans who have asked for it for several years. So finally I get to do it on my own label. It's just called *Merry Christmas*."

"It's difficult to choose the songs, there's a lot of beautiful songs out there. When you make a record, you try to make it unique and as original as you can while keeping it very traditional. I don't like

it when people butcher a song from its original form. So I just kept it kind of original and really simple and sparse ... something that's in the background kind of listenable on a Christmas morning or Christmas Eve. It's not a long record, about 33 minutes, so it kind of sits in nicely between Nat King Cole and something else."

Shelby is also looking forward to coming back to the UK before the end of the year for some concerts and to promote *TEARS, LIES & ALIBIS*.

"I haven't been able to get over there as much as I would have liked to. I'll be coming in November for a couple of dates. I'm putting the record out over there. It's been frustrating with the labels because they wouldn't want to spend the money it takes to get over there several times, so I'm taking the chance to do it because I realise how important it is. I mean I'd be silly if I didn't put my record out to my friends over there—the bigger labels didn't want to write that cheque. With the major labels, they give a record two months and if nothing happens it goes in the trash. Luckily, with my own label, I can spend all the time on it I want." **Alan Cackett**