

It has become a tradition here at colinlloyd-tucker.com for freelance journalist and self confessed Colin Lloyd Tucker 'nut' Helen Mann to preview new releases. Here she waxes poetic about his latest.

INNER NUTSHELL – June 2011

The long awaited Inner Nutshell album finally sees a release in June 2011. I have been listening to a pre-release copy over the last few days. So....what's it like?

First, let me say that the half dozen rather scratchy samples on Colin's web site do not really give you a feel for the albums overall sound and scope. There are in fact fourteen tracks on Inner Nutshell. The running order has obviously been carefully constructed, building a series of peaks and then dropping down before rising again. By the end you do indeed feel that you have been on a 'trip'.

The opener **Your Incredible Mind** is set around a sampled Sonny Terry harmonica groove. At first you could be forgiven for wondering 'where's Colin?' as Maggi Ronson's vocals are to the fore but we soon hear that familiar deep Lloyd Tucker growl soloing on the chorus "*Turning the wheels of life...Your incredible mind...I got a lot of stuff upstairs....even God is living up there*". Brilliantly arranged and performed with John Porter on guitar and Andy 'Wal' Coughlan on bass this is destined to become a classic Lloyd Tucker moment.

Next we get **Bellows & Reed** with its self-referential lyric about '*making up tunes in the harmonium room*'. That particular antique instrument pumps away throughout creating an effect not dissimilar to John Cale's viola on the first Velvet Underground album. All manner of sonic surprises occasionally burst in, including vocal grunts and shouts and castanet! Perhaps if the Velvets had done a spaghetti western soundtrack it would have sounded like this. Things calm down somewhat for the songs play-out, a delightful vocal refrain about high seas and '*locking up your daughter*'.

In **Irregular Nebular** the album's main themes are succinctly laid out. Tucker, always the 'outsider' trying to bridge the chasm between his inner self and the 'straight' outside world. This tension is well illustrated by the multiple guitars of Brian Neil, cutting and stabbing (he apparently played the parts with a knife and spoon instead of the normal fingers) that together with Tucker's open acoustic thrashing produce a rich backing to some great lyrics. As for the mental turmoil that is the songs (and albums) theme, what is CLT's preferred solution?... '*Crawl back into bed!*'.

For the title track **Inner Nutshell** Tucker has adapted Shelly's Prometheus Unbound with all its rich and mysterious imagery and framed the beautiful words in a mesmerizing, ever-shifting drone. Here he creates an entirely new, yet believable audio world. The drone structure allows the words to do their stuff, captivating and magical..."*Oh Follow, Follow*"

Keeping Our High Heads Low is classic CLT. The song-smith at his most beguiling. Full of typical CLT moments...The early sparse verses pull you in, the warm strings that cuddle you when they enter before fracturing into a strange other worldliness. This is the track that, when I have played this disk to friends, produces muttered references to a certain David Bowie. Colin by no means discourages this with the "*La da die*" middle section and I personally can't see a problem. It's a bloody good track and stands on its own merits.

Talking of Mr Bowie...take Fame, Scary Monsters and Fashion, mix them up in a 'great big melting pot' and the chances are you will produce a mutant hybrid like **Hollow World**. Here the musical references are very deliberate. Apparently this was originally called 'The Mullet Song' and for it Colin has reformed his backing band from the nineteen-eighties. Even the lyric imagines a bleak and blank future world so common in the songs of that time. CLT knows exactly what he is doing here. I am sure he is aware of the comparisons that his work attracts and here he appears to be saying 'so what'. It's the humour that is so apparent that convinces me of this and I for one get the joke!

The humour and mischief continue on the next track **The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat**. Musically it sounds like a Satanic T.Rex while the words refer to Dr Oliver Sack's book of the same name. A book in which he recounts the case histories of patients lost in the bizarre, apparently inescapable world of neurological disorders: people afflicted with fantastic perceptual and intellectual aberrations; patients who have lost their memories and with them the greater part of their pasts; who are no longer able to recognize people and common objects; who are stricken with violent tics and grimaces or who shout involuntary obscenities; whose limbs have become alien; who have been dismissed as retarded yet are gifted with uncanny artistic or mathematical talents.

CLT declares '*we are all the man who mistook his wife for a hat*'

Human Tide (Ring Out The Mortifying Bell) barely conceals the paranoiac sub text within its lyric. Lines like '*Time can see the sniper hide*' and '*winter came with icy claw*' suggest the natural concerns of an aging man and the music, though melodic and folksy has a jitteriness about it.

Head Over Heels is a love song, pure and simple. Pure in sentiment, simply arranged with acoustic guitar, piano and voice.

Multiple harmoniums provide most the backing for the uplifting **Bungalow Brain**. Over a rather fab. almost Cajun backdrop this strange and funny song is delivered in a rich deep tone...be warned it is catchy and may wedge itself in your head for days.

Next come two very short ditties. The first and shortest is **Isolationist's Lament** which without it's moog drone would be a pretty straight blues, musically anyway. The words, however, return to the 'outsider' theme with CLT stating quite clearly whose side he is on. '*When the sky is a wall and the people too tall, you want to crawl away somewhere....and the clouds are a shroud, you don't feel allowed to join in with the crowd... I'll be there*'.

This is followed by the courtly **Around A Round Table**. Another catchy tune that conjures up images of court minstrels in the middle ages performing for '*The twilight king and his shinny knights*'.

By all rights **Diamond** shouldn't be on this album. Its instrumentation is unlike any other track, yet as the penultimate song it sits very well. Gone are the organic drums of previous tracks to be replaced by a Kauffwerk type drum machine as on Trans Europe Express. Clocking in at over six minutes, the rest of the backing is provided by Paddy Bush's didgeridoo drone that has been morphed with a synthesizer to create huge, swooping washes of sound punctuated by an occasional tubular bell and more synthesizer arpeggios. Over this, from time to time comes a very close and loud vocal singing about a Diamond. At first I thought it was about the 'Diamond geezer' of cockney tradition but on closer inspection I believe it's about a diamond of the 'girls best friend' variety...I'm not sure and it doesn't matter. It is all very odd, compelling and weirdly charming.

The album closes with **Dream Song**. All gentle strings and sleepy singing. It's time to come down but not before Maggi Ronson delivers a wonderful kind of Walt Disney moment reminiscent of When You Wish Upon A Star. A very nice song extremely well performed.

So there you have it. How to sum up Inner Nutshell in a nut shell?

Anyone who may have thought, following the release of Cover Star, an album of cover versions that CLT was drying up and short of new songs of his own will see that this is not the case.

Inner Nutshell contains some of his finest melodies and lyrics. Everything here is 'complete' there are no loose ends. He is in very good voice throughout with the professional delivery we have come to expect but not afraid to let his vulnerability occasionally peep through. In fact I think that is one of his most endearing traits...his honesty.

His songs reveal a desire to connect with his fellow human beings, a longing to share, investigate and laugh at 'the human experience'.

When he sings about being with friends '*watching the time go*' I want to be there. His words in Your Incredible Mind are genuinely reassuring, encouraging the listener to shrug off any worrying notions as '*everything's gonna be alright*'. The opening couplet in Dream Song '*The lights are on but no ones home...floating on a sea of foam*' made me laugh out loud yet they are poetically beautiful.

When he sings '*There were some bad things up in my head but they don't live there anymore*' I not only believe it but I, like anyone else who is capable of being honest with them self, know what that feels like.

Looking through some old reviews that Colin sent me words like 'craftsmanship' and 'song smith' are ever present but for me that's not the main attraction....he is fearless and consequently vulnerable, that's where the beauty lies and what other great artists see in his work. In the early nineteen-eighties a review in Sounds magazine predicted that Colin would never become a major star, not because of his music but because of his in-built integrity. I know for a fact that his knowledge of music history is vast and that he is painfully aware of where he falls in the scheme of things.

A Melody Maker reviewer cried 'bring back the fostering of the Great British eccentric!' but it never happened and CLT continues to tread a lonely path.

Inner nutshell will have to wait for discovery, along with all his other undiscovered master pieces.

Fads may come and go but Colin Lloyd Tucker will always be relevant because of his honesty and his talent.