

≈ BOB COLLUM ≈  
*The New Old Thing*

Look back over the history of English rock'n'roll and you find the county of Essex has provided fertile soil as a breeding and proving ground for talented and inventive musicians. Sometimes it's also proved welcoming and sustaining territory for the exile. Such is the case with Bob Collum whose long and winding road finished up in Basildon, certainly some little distance from his native dust of Oklahoma.

A locale with plentiful small clubs and venues, and easy access to the London pub circuit, was just the ticket for this resourceful and ready performer. In the decade and more he's been here he's come up with a series of memorable albums; the solo releases *More Tragic Songs of Life* and *Low Rent Romeo*, plus two with his Welfare Mothers *The Boy Most Likely To* and *Set The Stupid Free*. Then latterly the *Twisted Lines & Mixed Up Rhythms* EP.

While Bob and his shifting cast of bandmates play cosmic American music as if to the manner born, there's always been a liberal sprinkling of folk-rock and power pop, and a sound instinct for hook and melody. The Searchers invoked as surely as the Burritos or The Byrds.

For *The New Old Thing* Bob again allies himself with a gang of fine support players including the exceptional pedal-steel player Allan Kelly, and the former Vibrator and ubiquitous producer Pat Collier is once more at the controls. The EP features some typically elliptical Collum songs; he's very good at providing the bones of what seem emotive and dramatic situations then inviting the listener to flesh out the story.

'The Next Time' gets proceedings rocking with thrusting guitar and insistent pedal steel in what's part put-down song and part good advice to a 'three time loser too lost to be found'. The bouncing bass and keening steel of 'Crawford County' frame a tale of escape to an 'empty shack' but is it to the wrong side of the tracks or a safe

haven?

Superclyde, of 'Superclyde & Me', the 'ex-wife's brother-in-law with a neck like the trunk of a tree, sounds like a larger than life refugee from The Dukes Of Hazzard via Flannery O'Connor but what precisely does he get up to and is it for good or ill?

'Not Quite You' shows Bob and his cohorts in perky string-band mode with an old-time feel while 'King Of Stringtown' showcases the pedal steel in another oblique adventure. Finally 'Why Do You Scare Me' just voice and solo on guitar speaks directly, showing us briefly a more intimate, uncertain, and tender aspect of the singer.

*The New Old Thing* sits clearly at the country end of Bob Collum's spectrum, but as with all his work it far outstretches any cliché of genre, transcending the tropes, and showing itself as assuredly and definitively his own.

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