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Hills and Valleys

The Flatlanders



Considering that the album that made the Flatlanders a legend in country music circles was cut in 1972, it's hard not to think of the trio -- featuring three of Texas' finest singer/songwriters, Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, and Butch Hancock -- as a throwback to the Golden Age of Lone Star music in the 1970s and '80s that has somehow managed to survive into the 21st century. But the Flatlanders make it clear that they're still living in the here and now on their third album since reuniting in 2002,

Hills and Valleys. The album begins with three songs that address contemporary tragedies in personal terms -- "Homeland Refugee" tells the tale of one man's struggle to get by after losing everything he owns in the financial meltdown, "Borderless Love" uses a relationship as a metaphor for the fence being constructed on the U.S./Mexico border, and "After the Storm" is set in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. While these songs certainly give *Hills and Valleys* a greater currency than the Flatlanders' earlier work, they also speak to the facts of life in Texas in 2009, something these men know more than bit about, and if the rest of the set explores the personal rather than the political, the music shows Ely, Gilmore, and Hancock can still write and sing about the heart, the soul, and the spirit with a touch that's truly timeless. Unlike 2004's disappointing *Wheels of Fortune*, *Hills and Valleys* is dominated by fresh material written collaboratively by the trio, and there's an "all for one, one for all" élan to this music that brings out strong performances in the three vocalists. And producer Lloyd Maines and his team of gifted backing musicians provide strong and soulful accompaniment throughout. Thirty-seven years after their first album got lost in the shuffle, the Flatlanders have not only survived, they have a lot to say about what they've seen, and *Hills and Valleys* is proof these men still have plenty of songs in them yet.

Contact:

Lance Cowan • LCMedia • (615) 331-1710 • lcmedia@bellsouth.net