

## COREY LANDIS

### *Corey Landis*

(Urban Myth Records - 2007)



**Corey Landis'** 2007 album *Corey Landis* is his third and marks a departure for him, not in style but in scope. The 12-track (plus) release features original compositions by Corey, but this time supported with orchestral arrangements by Joey Newman of the "Newman musical dynasty" (which includes his composer/father Thomas and his uncle Randy, and his father's father before that). Corey remains an act geared essentially as a solo, and the producing team of Corey, Joey Newman and Greg Hayes didn't mess with that. The added orchestral instruments, though there are many, are used with a light touch. Corey even goes so far as to add bass, pedal steel and female backing vocals in one instance, but the essential "Coreyness" remains intact. This third CD is an exercise in lounge and barroom piano balanced with deep excursions into his personal inner soundtrack.

"Welcome to the Limbo Lounge," the opening track on the album, is musically in Randy Newman ragtime territory, if Randy could play faster, until about half way in when it veers toward Tom Waits. Lyrically it is pure Corey. He considers alternatives to improving, or running away from, his personal appeal, with an optimism that boomerangs from hopeful to dissolve into lines like "Maybe I'll sail away in vomit as the acid dissolves the boat..." Corey, still the transplant from the Midwest, feels in foreign territory and is a little sick about it.

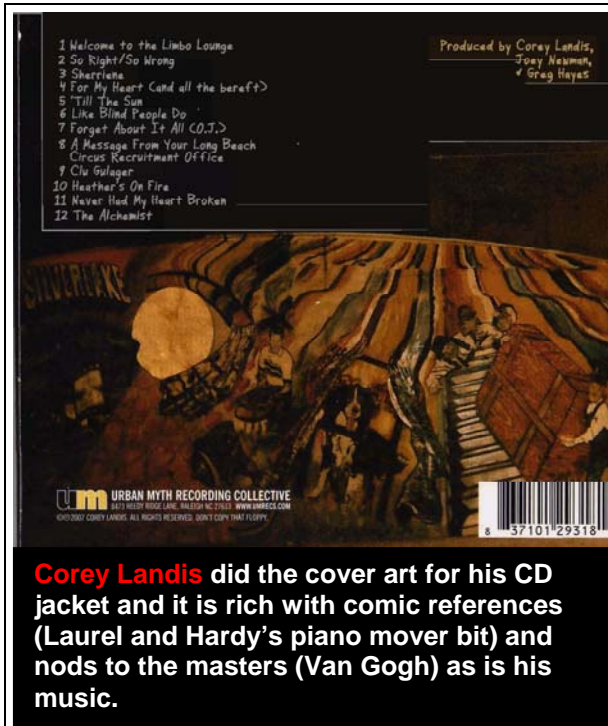
"So Right/So Wrong" brings on the strings, laid thick and traditional, in a way that couches Corey's voice, which is near perfect on this track. Corey has a rich middle register and vocal dexterity that matches the whip-crack wit in his lyrics, which come in serpentine torrents. This song is filled with longing and sorrow and is affecting. Corey is insecure in the city again, and he has unsteady associates. This is a world-class tune. Beautiful string arrangement.

"Sherriene" is "*new-Corey*" - a country-inflected, pedal steel saturated bar singer with a song that comes right out of the Gram Parsons songbook. He tells a neo-tragic story of a bar slut. "You're life's become nothing but a Lifetime movie scene / Who's dry humping you now, Sherriene?" Mariana Gillies does a wandering background vocal that is almost a send-up on Emmylou Harris, furthering the whole familiar feel of this track.

Just when you've popped a cold one to listen to "Sherriene" being dry humped, "For My Heart (and all the bereft)" pours forth in a bed of strings and oboes and reminds you that Billy Joel was once great. It is almost scary the way Corey Landis channels these guys - Joel, Zevon, Waits - and that is no criticism. A fellow songwriter will listen to Corey's tunes and feel a kinship in that Corey Landis heard and absorbed the same extraordinary influences that moved a previous generation of writers, but whose stars are really within the reach of only a few, Corey being one. His musical vocabulary is rich, his writer's senses are keen, and he has vocal talents that occasionally feel staggering. "For My Heart" is truly heart breaking in its marriage of minor figures and wistful lyrical content. Corey has great range and is really sweet in his high register, which he uses sparingly but to great effect. This song is a "Corey Landis" and has odd lyrics - "It's only thanks to a baboon I'm standing here today..." - but somehow it has the qualities of a Disney movie theme. Great string arrangements, wonderful trumpet.

"Till The Sun" continues a pattern on this album, lush alternating with stripped down, and here Corey is deep in classic Billy Joel territory again, maybe a little Warren Zevon in there, too. "I'll watch over you...till the sun turns blue..." Corey is in caretaker mode here, being the hopeful one. One senses a theme in Corey's thinking that however uncertain he is of himself, he trusts *him* more than he trusts *them*. Another cool tune.

A time out here to note my own tendency to speak of "Corey" as if I know him, which I don't. I just know these songs and through them I *feel* I know Corey. Let that sink in for a moment. Isn't this exactly the kind of impact that separates output from artistry? My experience is that Corey is best appreciated under headphones, where he seems more intimate and accessible. Lyrically he walks a thin line between wit and easy smarts and you need to *feel* the musical positioning to think the better. But Corey Landis is sometimes able to lift that veil between performer and audience that is the mark of elevation in theatrical communication, and it creates wonder at what may be to come.



**Corey Landis did the cover art for his CD jacket and it is rich with comic references (Laurel and Hardy's piano mover bit) and nods to the masters (Van Gogh) as is his music.**

heartstrings.

"Heather's On Fire" is another Billy Joel-like recollection of high school love you wish you'd had. Sometimes one just sees the other as a friend, while sometimes for the other helping with calculus just isn't enough.

"Never Had My Heart Broken" is an inventory of stuff that never happened, both good and bad. You tend to get what you give and the Corey in this song maybe wasn't giving enough. A lot of loss here, a lot of missed opportunity, set against a strumming acoustic guitar.

"The Alchemist" is a lovely, mournful ballad about someone who misled. It is beautifully sung and with this song Corey finishes out his album taking the same pleasure in neatly constructed piano figures that he has throughout. These romantic structures are his signature, as much his acerbic, often profane lyrics.

There is a bonus track on the CD that plays after a long bit of silence following the twelfth track. This must have been a part of his deal with Joey Newman because what you get is an orchestral version of Corey's tune "So Right/So Wrong," and variations on the established theme. It is beautiful movie music, wonderfully conceived and performed.

Corey Landis, for all the comparisons to other pianist/songwriters, may be a bit captive to his own niche quality. This is not exactly radio stuff, at least not in this era. I'm not even sure it is Internet stuff, the music being way too traditionally MOR for today's kid markets. It would take a bit of maturity to fully appreciate Corey's angst, his sense of humor, and his recounting of personal history. For all these reasons, it is hard to place Corey Landis in the current firmament of popular music. Maybe he doesn't care. An actor, painter, musician, writer and singer...Corey may not have the focus of other less diverse talents. The album shows that he has a sort of off-hand capacity for high quality musical contributions. He probably hasn't fully realized himself with this, his third CD, but Corey is deep in ability and observational intelligence and here he provides more than ample evidence of both. One senses that he is going to be around for a long while yet, and that he could mature to become the Randy Newman-guy you'll see every year on stage at the Academy Awards, playing another of his generally pleasing nominated tunes.

Some of Corey's music can be heard at his MySpace site at <http://www.myspace.com/coreylandis> and at his home website at [www.coreylandis.com](http://www.coreylandis.com).



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"I'll have to listen with my ears, like blind people do..."

That line comes from the next track, "Like Blind People Do," which is another of the "Tom Waits-flavored" tracks on the LP. Corey scores with a piano story of determination unbuttressed by anything solid. "It may take me a while, but I think I'd learn to go on without you..."

Corey's going to commit public suicide in "Forget About It All (O.J.)," or treat you to an Orange Julius at the mall. One of these. He captures, in just over a minute, a slice of the confusion that comes with immature relationships.

"A Message From Your Long Beach Circus Recruitment Office" is Corey in comic mode. "There's too much room in the little car..." It's a novelty tune, an advertisement for participation in a public entertainment. It's upbeat fun and the only real knock-off on the album.

"Clu Gulager" must be a portrait of malaise, as we seem to get the ramblings of a guy without purpose camped in front of a television set. What else could possibly bring Clu Gulager to mind? Sometimes boredom doesn't yield a great song, but it doesn't matter - Corey decompresses here after letting all that heavy baggage dangle from his