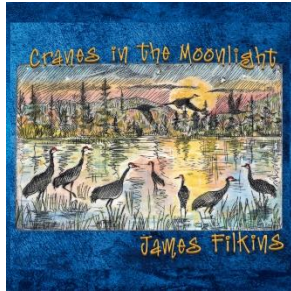


James Filkins

Cranes in the Moonlight

jamefilkins.com



The very title of this album, **Cranes in the Moonlight** conjures up such a peaceful scenario. It is one of those rare, magical moments in nature and in time when everything is perfect. Just enough moon light in just enough open sky and just enough quiet. Now all we have to do is add in James Filkins' glorious fingerstyle guitar, a dozen Sandhill cranes, and we have it all. Filkins contemporary guitar music is fortified with several other instruments including accordion, flute, strings and additional guitars. It all works out. I have to admit Filkins' style reminded me of the veterans like Craig Chaquico, Ottmar Liebert, and Wayne Gratz who built the genre. Not a bad a lineup with which to be associated.

The search for feathery freedom is evident in the opening track **Unfettered**. Cranes, if you ever saw them take off, have this wondrous ability to be airborne with one sweep of their wings. One second on the ground, blink your eyes, and there they are, floating in the air. Filkins deftly captures that aerial magic of lightness, lift, and freedom in his quiet, midtempo tune.

In some cultures the crane is a symbol of fortune and longevity. Mythology says they can live for a thousand years. James' gentle, stylistic title tune **Cranes in the Moonlight** allows us to peak through the reeds and watch these majestic birds as they forage and frolic at the marsh's edge. The tune is warm and folksy, a comfortable background to a silver light experience. Hey! Did you hear that?

One of the most remarkable tunes on the album is called **When Your Wife Travels to Italy**. Quite the title. If ever there was a story inside a piece of music, this is it. Quiet, harmonic tinged guitar mixed with sultry violin and old world accordion make this travelogue mysterious and romantic.

My favorite track on *Cranes in the Moonlight* is one called **Van Gogh & Picasso**. The images of sparkling stars in a blue velvet sky from Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* and the bright colors of Picasso's *La Rêve* combine via Filkins silky soft tune to convey a vivid, dreamy fantasy fraught with bold riffs choices layered with quiet strums. The impression of *La Rêve* in which two becomes one inside a dream seems apropos in this melodic situation.

Bright green leaves bigger than mittens face the sun in the breeze, wavering, victims to every gust, volunteer to every heavenly breath. **Poplars in the Wind** is a pensive solo guitar instrumental just right for sitting on a big rock on a sunny day and contemplating your thoughts. **Gray Skies Over Port Oneida** traces a dark, lead-colored sky, a blustery wind, and rows and rows of white caps in the distance. Just off M-22 and west of Port Pyramid Trailhead is Port Oneida in northwest Michigan. James' somber music suggests there is unrest on the lake; frothy

white waves that may spell danger. The lake is long and wide and full of the unexplained. This is a very emotional tune which has a metered refrain and devoted cello that tries to warn us. **Life on the 45th Parallel** allows James to display his talents on a light tune with a lot of complex fretwork. The dynamic tune is a good example of Americana with just a hint of contemporary folksiness and it is just what a modern day retrospective should sound like.

On the final tune on the album James explores **Forgiveness**, the strongest act that is just below love on my chart of the most important things in the whole wide world. Imagine carrying a big bag of rocks on your back for twenty years because you don't think you have the inner strength to drop the bag. Forgiveness is something you can give to yourself that benefits another. Getting off the soapbox here, James evocative tune is as soulful and deep as it is generous and tender. It is a memorable tune that you might find yourself playing over and over and just falling into the recesses of your own soul. Beautiful music here.

James is joined on the album by Jess Townsend, Luis Vilca, Alexander Somov, Silvio Centamore, Josia Cieslak, Steve Reinthal, and Noah Zacharin and on other tunes that include Earthbound, Good Harbor Day, Brothers, and Mercy Dropeth Like Rain. Many of the tunes are what I like to refer to as rainy day tunes, my favorite kind of music, even if it's not a rainy day. Filkins compositions are complex and heterogeneous enough to make his music consistently interesting. Highly listenable.

- R J Lannan, ArtisanMusicReviews.com