



Larry Jaffee

Rock

Garland Jeffreys *Truth Serum*
Luna Park LPR-003

TALK ABOUT **SECOND** acts. After much success as an acclaimed recording artist and performer from the early 1970s through the early 1980s, Garland Jeffreys sort of dropped out of sight.

Marrying the love of his life more than 33 years ago and having a child late in life (not to mention being a bit fed up with draconian aspects of the record industry), Jeffreys decided he wanted to be a hands-on dad and watch his daughter – now 18 and going to college in the fall – grow up.

Perhaps appreciated more in Europe, his 1997 album *Wildlife Dictionary* wasn't even released in the U.S.

Coming on the heels of *The King of In Between* (2011), the impeccably recorded *Truth Serum* is his second album of new material in three years, and may very well be the best record he's ever recorded, and certainly the most satisfying throughout since the earlier high-water mark of *Escape Artist* (1981).

One of rock's most literate purveyors, Jeffreys is the proud owner of a body of work that oozes humanity and surviving the mean streets of New York.

Having recently turned 71, it almost seems this septuagenarian is making up for lost time. The bluesy title track of the latest album packs a punch, as Duke Levine plays a mean slide guitar and Brian Mitchell blows harp, amid Jeffreys barking out lyrics that tell a dark tale of sinner meets his maker. If Robert Johnson was around today, he may very well lay down a side like "Truth Serum," which is the first of many highlights.

The slickly produced "Any Rain" sounds like it could have been left off one of Jeffreys's albums at his major-label peak, more than three decades ago.

"It's What I Am" lyrically tackles Jeffreys's familiar subject matter of race discrimination. With an African-

American father and Puerto Rican mother, Jeffreys grew up "Too white to be black/Too black to be white." The race theme shows up later on the album in "Colorblind Love."

"Dragons to Slay" is the obligatory reggae track, a mainstay of Jeffreys, who tells a great story of being outside the Manhattan club Max's Kansas City proudly handing his 1973 solo debut to Bob Marley, with whom he enjoyed a great friendship.

"Ship of Fools" improves on the original version on his album *American Boy & Girl* (1979), and this time around features Mitchell's beautiful accordion playing.

Guitarist-in-demand Larry Campbell summons up on "Collide the Generations" a dueling, heavenly guitar jam between the Velvet Underground's Lou Reed and Sterling Morrison, both R.I.P. (Jeffreys and Reed were pals for 50 years, having first met at Syracuse University in the early 1960s. They periodically appeared on each other's albums, most recently with Lou helping out on a chorus of "The Contortionist" on *The King of In Between*.)

"Collide the Generations" lyrically deals with Jeffreys's relationship with his daughter, "Daddy's little girl." The song also inspired a great new website at www.collidethegenerations.com in which creative parents write about how music figures in their relationships with their kids.

There's a reason why Bruce Springsteen periodically invites the criminally overlooked Jeffreys to join him on stadium show stages for "96 Tears," the 1960s garage hit that Jeffreys made all his own on *Escape Artist*.

Like actor Warren Beatty in film, Jeffreys may not be the most prolific singer-songwriter, but when he finds his muse itching to practice his art, watch out!