

The Graham Weekly Album Review #1370

Jim Gilmour: *Quarterline* by George Graham

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While musical style fads come and go, some genres have great durability. Jazz, for example, is building new music on the foundations that have been around for something approaching 100 years. The singer-songwriter form is also proving its longevity. Tracing its roots back to the folk musicians in the early part of the 20th Century, and then brought to the fore by the late Woody Guthrie toward the middle of the century, the style inspired several generations of artists from Bob Dylan in 1960s on. And it shows no signs of being tapped out creatively. In essence, its simplicity -- a person singing original songs with lyrics that have something to say -- ensures that as long as the communication between artist and audience exists, there will likely be singer-songwriters plying their trade, and people to listen to them, despite the absence of such music on the commercial media.

Currently, we have a great proliferation of singer-songwriters, with hundreds of them releasing their CDs each year, mostly through independent labels or entirely on their own. Obviously with that many artists on the scene releasing CDs competing for fans' attention, the quality can range from masterpieces to downright awful. It doesn't take a great deal of musical perception to realize that a good singer-songwriter should sing well and write worthwhile songs. Sometimes one facet is better than the other. But when you have a very good combination of both in an artist, it's hard to go wrong. This week's CD is a worthy example by an artist who combines an appealing high-tenor vocal with thoughtful original songs, and in this case very tasteful musicianship. He is Jim Gilmour, and his CD is called **Quarterline**.

Vermont resident Jim Gilmour is one of those people who has been in the background in the music business for almost 20 years, as a bassist, backing vocalist and producer/engineer at his own studio. His biography also includes a stint as video news crew member, working for NBC. After working in a supporting role musically for those years, he decided to take up songwriting in earnest in 1998. For this CD, he assembled some talented people who have graced the recordings by some of today's best in the genre. They include producer/engineer and multi-instrumentalist Ben Wisch, who has produced CDs by Marc Cohn, Cheryl Wheeler and [Patty Larkin](#). Also appearing is guitarist [Duke Levine](#), known for his work with Mary Chapin Carpenter and [John Gorka](#), and as well as being an outstanding artist on his own; and drummer Shawn Pelton a veteran of the Saturday Night Live band, and albums by Joan Osborne and Edie Brickell among others. Gilmour himself handles both acoustic guitar and bass duties.

This is a group who know just what to add to bring out the best in a singer-songwriter, and when combined with Gilmour's qualities, makes for a very pleasing and worthwhile recording.

Gilmour writes about subjects that have certainly been explored before, such as relationships with an emphasis on loves torn asunder. He can give a very melodic treatment to some rather sad, and even tragic lyrics. Many of his songs are narratives that unfold as they go along, including some with surprise turns of events at their end. Musically, while many of the arrangement ideas have been used on other CDs on which these backing musicians have appeared, it all comes together very well and tastefully here.

The relatively brief 40 minute CD begins with the title track, *Quarterline*. The piece establishes the sound of the album, with the laid-back, classy arrangement providing the backing to Gilmour's likable, relaxed airy tenor vocals, and his intelligent lyrics. In this case, the song seems to be about a place of refuge. <<>>

Rather different in lyrical direction is *Hour in Texarkana* the story of a tragic figure who had just lost his baby to illness. He is found sleeping in his car by a law officer, and ultimately brings on further tragedy. <<>>

Another story song turns out to be one of the highlight tracks of the CD, *Hometown*, whose protagonist is anxious to get out of the place in which he grew up. Then he falls in and out of love, and ultimately returns to the place he was so anxious to leave. <<>>

Separation is a theme that runs through several of the songs. *Another Day* explores the subject combined with a little consideration of one's place in the greater scheme of things. <<>>

Another song that combines a pretty musical setting with some decidedly downbeat lyrics is *Still Don't Know*. It's about a character whose mother ran off with a man, and then disappeared for decades. A car, matching the description of the one in which she was last seen is found underwater. But it is not what was hoped for. <<>>

There are two songs which run together to be a kind of six-minute suite. *Put a Little* and *Falling* again visit the subject of separation, in this case the end of an affair. <<>>

Gilmour again mixes lyrics of a decidedly unhappy nature with a musical setting that is anything but. *Why Run* considers drug addiction from the perspective of the user who just can't seem to stop. <<>>

The CD ends on another sad note, *Jeanine* is the story of a free-spirited girl who died apparently in a motor scooter accident. The musical setting is appropriately introspective, with just Gilmour and the atmospheric electric guitar of Mark Schulman. <<>>

After toiling as a sideman and behind the scenes as a producer or engineer, Jim Gilmour has stepped out with an outstanding solo CD debut in **Quarterline**. He is very good at what singer-songwriters are supposed to do with his instantly likable vocals and multifaceted songs, with their complex characters and story lines that don't always have a happy ending. The musical backing is about as fine as you'll encounter in the field, with exceptionally tasteful playing by the gathered musicians and the understated, sensitive production by Ben Wisch. Sometimes the musical mood is at odds with the content of the lyrics, but that often enhances the irony. The result is an album that can be listened to on several levels, from the pleasing sound to the complicated story lines in the lyrics.

Our sound quality grade is a definite but now increasingly rare "A." There is a wonderfully intimate sound, with very good clarity on vocals and instrumentation. The sound is also [relatively uncompressed](#), with a nice dynamic range which allows the finer points of the music to shine through.

With hundreds of good, recent singer-songwriter CDs available, Jim Gilmour's **Quarterline** begs the question what does the CD have that sets it apart from so many others? The answer is a simple one, quality. Gilmour and company are a class act, from the songs to the sonic treatment. It's a textbook example of what a singer-songwriter record should strive for.

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