

LARRY JON WILSON: LARRY JON WILSON (1965) ****

Friday June 27, 2008

By Robert Spellman

A raw, unadorned set of songs make up the fifth album of Larry Jon Wilson, the enigmatic singer-songwriter from Augusta, GA.

If you've never heard of Larry Jon, it's because, despite some golden opportunities, he always refused to sell out. But ask Kris Kristofferson or Willie Nelson who their favourite singers are the 68-year-old's name is offered up.

In the early Seventies Wilson was thick with Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark and Tony Joe White - smart young southerners as enamoured with Bob Dylan as the Grand Ol Opry. Often labelled as country music's 'outlaw generation', their music was spare, usually introspective and one detected a desire to dignify the south, to expunge the unsavoury elements associated with their elders. They drew from soul, blues and in Wilson's case funk. Country-funk, or better funky-country would be a fair way to describe his two great Seventies albums: *New Beginnings* and *Let Me Sing My Songs To You*.

But Wilson's eponymous fifth is another matter. Townes Van Zandt's white-knuckle album *Live At The Old Quarter* is a spiritual ally. He stood in a packed Texas club and poured his heart out, and Larry Jon has done the same in a Florida studio.

At times Wilson's big tobacco voice comes near to breaking over songs like *Goodbye Eyes*, *Shoulders* and *Losers' Trilogy*. Larry sounds so close, you can hear his fingers screech across the acoustic guitar strings as the songs unfold. Often he just reminisces, subtly alluding to enormous loss and rescuing himself with wry poetical grace.