

Mike Blakely – The Rarest of the Breed
Reviewed by Rick Flowers Texas 1823 Music

With *The Rarest of the Breed*, Mike Blakely and producer John M. Greenberg deliver a groundbreaking new album. If you have read one of Mike's novels, you already know that he is a master of visual imagery. *The Rarest of the Breed* not only confirms, but enhances this reputation.

What began as a project for a new group of western songs, became an intriguing concept album through the vision of producer Greenberg (aka Johnny Gringo). Centered around *The Last Wild White Buffalo*, the inaugural Spur Award winner for Western Songwriting, Blakely and Greenberg send us on a journey across a developing America.

Through the eyes of a young man lamenting a first love gone bad, we follow the western expansion beginning in the hills of Kentucky circa 1855 (*Blue in Kentucky*). Through his travels we hear tales of his life, loves, adventures, regrets and the stories of a few characters he meets on his way west.

Go Easy tells of a young ranger reveling in the wildness of the Texas frontier. *Dodging My Own Bullet* is a story of another love gone wrong and a man who can't seem to get out of his own way. *Cupid's Bow* hints at the possibility of true love healing all the pain and struggles of the past.

There are three songs / stories that will (or should) haunt the listener. *The Last Wild White Buffalo* is a story of expansionary greed and waste that leads the hunter to learn the meaning of life. *Soy Cayuse Cimarron* tells of the Sand Creek Massacre, one of the worst atrocities committed in the nineteenth century, through the eyes of a Cheyenne Dog Soldier. While the finale, *A Slow Night in Tacoma*, is a tale about the beauty and hardship of living free juxtaposed against the hellish boredom of living safe.

As with any concept album, such as *The Redheaded Stranger* and *Desperado*, it is intended to be listened to from start to finish without interruption. But just like the aforementioned albums, each song stands on its own as the "concept" idea did not evolve until production had started. John M. Greenberg draws on some heady talent for the session, Lloyd Maines, Chris Gage, Dick Gimble and Tina Mitchell Wilkins to name a few.

The Rarest of the Breed cements Mike Blakely as one of the finest western singer/songwriters living and John M. Greenberg as one of the best up and coming young producers in Texas music. Give it a listen and you will agree.