

Blue Rodeo's *Casino* reviewed

I have never really considered myself to be much of a country music fan, with the exception of a deep and abiding love for Lyle Lovett and his fabulous hair. I think this indifference to the music has prevented my gaining an appreciation for how much country has influenced the pop music that I enjoy: Elvis Costello, John Hiatt, Nick Lowe, the list of rockers whose regularly mine C&W for inspiration is endless.

The preceding drivel is inspired by the surprise I felt recently after reading about Blue Rodeo and their recent *Casino* album. The article stated that the band saw their mission as being to bring country music to the uninitiated. The thing here is, I have never really considered these guys to be overly (overtly?) country. Granted, even a moron like yours truly can tell that much of Jim Cuddy's hurtin' stuff is obviously country. But Greg Keelor's songs, like Rose-Coloured Glasses from their first album *Outskirts*, or Love and Understanding from *Diamond Mine*, always seemed, to these crusty ill-informed ears, to be real great rock songs. The organ, which is quite dominant on numbers like *Diamond Mine*, seemed

more like a mutant jazzy Ray Manzarek, man, than traditional country colouring. The propensity to doodling and meandering on numbers like *Diamond Mine* also seemed antithetical to tight,

conservative country. So in the interest of journalistic integrity, I went back and listened to the first two albums, as well as *Casino*. Indeed I was mistaken, for like a fine donut they are country-

style. They also have held up very well over a few years an repeated listenings. What is more interesting is how smooth and self-assured they seem. The band appeared to

know what they were doing from the start, confident and mature, a state of being I deeply resent. The harmonies are tight, the playing solid, the songs well crafted.

Casino is no radical break from the earlier stuff. The album is much shorter than *Diamond Mine*, and the previously mentioned doodling and meandering has been cut out. The blending of Cuddy and Keelor's voices is still just about perfect. The organ adds a Band-like body to the songs that help create a sound quite different from the thousands of twang bands out there. Again the plaintive and passionate songs of Cuddy, which still seem more 'countryified' to me, are followed by Greg Keelor's raspy (country) rockers. A few songs like *Two Tongues* and *Time* move away from C&W altogether, the former into 60's psychedelia, the latter a great straight rocker. They are a very good band, and deserve to be successful. I hope they are having some fun.



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