

Mp3 Chris Whitley - Live At Martyrs'

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With fingers flailing and boot stomping, Chris performed 15 songs covering all four previous full-length albums and two new compositions. 14 MP3 Songs FOLK: Folk Blues, ROCK: Folk Rock Details: CHRIS WHITLEY (1960-2005) Singer/songwriter and guitarist Chris Whitley passed away of lung cancer on Sunday, Nov. 20, in Houston, Texas, at age 45. Chris is survived by his daughter, Trixie Whitley, 18, of Belgium, whose voice could occasionally be heard in the background of Chris's records over the years, as well as on stage with him. He is also survived by his brother, singer/guitarist Daniel Whitley (who contributed guitar to several of Chris's albums); his sister, Bridget Whitley Anderson, of Vermont; his ex-wife, Hlne Gevaert, of Belgium; and his father, Jerry Whitley, of New Jersey. A man of rare poetic honesty, Chris maintained a resolute musical integrity throughout his career. His 12 albums, ranging from raw-boned folk-rock to lush electro-blues, had the thread of intense emotion and constant invention running through them. Chris's hit debut LP, *Living With the Law*, came out on Columbia in 1991. His final album, *Soft Dangerous Shores*, came out in June 2005 via Messenger Records, the independent label he worked with most. The discs now seem like spiritual/aesthetic book-ends. Both mix roots-rock grit with heat-haze atmospherics and were produced/engineered by Malcolm Burn. If his beloved debut still contains some of his best-known songs, *Soft Dangerous Shores* has the elusive intertwining of organic and synthetic that Chris often held as an ideal. Christopher Becker Whitley was born Aug. 31, 1960, in Houston, to a restless, artistic couple: His mother was a sculptress and painter; his father worked as an art director in a series of advertising jobs. As a family, they traveled through the Southwest, with many of the images the young boy absorbed finding their way later into songs. He once described his parents' music taste as formed "by race radio in the South." The real deal -- Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf -- seeped into their son's soul, eventually leading to Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix. Chris's parents divorced when he was 11 years old, and he moved with his mother to a small cabin in Vermont. It was there that he learned to play guitar. Hearing Johnny Winter's "Dallas" was the seed for what would develop as Chris's keening instrumental style. Inspired by the naked, crying sound of the acoustic dobro in "Dallas," Chris bought a National steel dobro and taught himself how to play the blues with a bottleneck slide. He

quit high school not long after, moving to New York City. In Manhattan, Chris worked odd jobs and played on street corners in the West Village. Then, the owner of a travel agency who had long loved his playing offered Chris a free ticket to Belgium. During his sojourn there, he scored some minor success by playing dance music in a group called Oh No Rodeo (with Hlne and Alan Gevaert), even covering Prince tunes. The European experience was seminal in many ways, including his developing an abiding taste for Kraftwerk and other Euro-avatars. Belgium is also where his daughter was born. Back in New York, Chris Whitley was working in a picture-frame factory when a photographer friend invited him along for an outdoor shoot. It was in a park that Chris was introduced to Daniel Lanois, producer of such top acts as U2 and Peter Gabriel. Lanois was a fellow guitarist, and his eclectic tastes mirrored Chris's own. Lanois helped Chris get his initial deal with Columbia to record his debut in the producer's New Orleans studio with Malcolm Burn (a Lanois protg, who went on to work with Emmylou Harris and the Neville Brothers). One of the all-time classic debuts, *Living With the Law* mines romance and regret, beauty and brooding in a vein of archetypal Americana. Cinematically produced, the album features fine detail players from the Lanois circle, but the focus rests firmly on Whitley's fallen-angel falsetto and his rustic virtuosity on National steel. "I Forget You Every Day" and the title song are aching dust-bowl ballads. "Make the Dirt Stick" whines and moans like a forlorn train whistle through the dark woods. "Big Sky Country" is a yearning plea for wider horizons, borne along by the virtual call-and-response of gospel harmonies. Regarding his state-of-affairs when writing these initial songs, Chris once said: "The songs on *Living With the Law* were fatalistic, hopeless. My marriage was breaking up. I was working in a factory in my late 20s. But desperation can be a good impetus for writing songs." Those songs struck a chord. *Rolling Stone* magazine praised Chris as "a visionary. . . a bona-fide poet." Another admirer described Chris's songs as "haunting, like a Robert Frank photograph." Director Ridley Scott chose a song from the album, "Kick the Stones," for the "Thelma and Louise" soundtrack. A long lull kept Chris from capitalizing completely on the success of his debut. Moreover, the four-year gap between *Living With the Law* and his sophomore disc sounds more like 40, as he sought to break free of any business-as-usual restrictions. With a psychosexual caterwaul redolent of power trios from Cream to Nirvana, *Din of Ecstasy* won Chris new hard-rock fans -- even as its mix of existential pain and poetic noise put off some listeners more attuned to the bucolic beauties of "Big Sky Country." The album's brazen masterstroke was to drag urban blues screaming into the late 20th century, conflating the spirits of Elmore James and Kurt Cobain with such

riveting standouts as "Narcotic Prayer." Chris's Sony swansong, *Terra Incognita*, saw his sound continuing to combust at the crossroads of Hendrixian drama and Delta soul. The album's ghostly psalm "Cool Wooden Crosses" would become a staple of his solo shows. Chris's departure from Sony could've been a defeat, but it ended up the best sort of medicine, as he stepped up to the indie challenge. The little New York label Messenger ended up selling more copies of his next album, 1998's *Dirt Floor*, than Sony had of *Terra Incognita*. The folk-blues songs of *Dirt Floor* were recorded in a single day at his father's Vermont barn-cum-bike shop with producer Craig Street (known for his work with Cassandra Wilson, for whom Whitley provided studio guitar). Such sepia-toned songs as the title lament and "Scrapyard Lullaby" were powered by just the time-honored tools of voice, guitar, banjo and rhythmic boot. Recorded the next year in Chicago, *Live at Martyrs'* documents a great night of solo Whitley, including his sharp-edged cover of Kraftwerk's "The Model." Around the same period, Chris also covered "I Can't Stand Myself" for a James Brown tribute disc, setting off sparks against a beat-box. But he painted a fully evocative picture of his influences with the 2000 all-covers set *Perfect Day*. Teamed with the earthy, empathetic rhythm duo from groove-jazz trio Medeski, Martin Wood, Chris not only beautifully reanimated songs by Muddy Waters ("She's Alright"), Robert Johnson ("Stones in My Pathway") and Bob Dylan ("Fourth Time Around"); he also cut to the poetic heart of the Doors' "Crystal Ship" and Lou Reed's "Perfect Day" in a way that rivals the originals. *Rocket House*, a 2001 release on ATO, was perhaps the most ambitious of Chris's career. Tony Mangurian's production opened new sonic vistas, from the buzzing electro-rock of the opener "To Joy (Revolution of the Innocents)" to the aching dreamscape of the closing "Something Shines." A Sony Legacy compilation, *Long Way Around: An Anthology 1991-2001*, not only traces Chris's Columbia years; it includes the lyrical *Rocket House* single "Say Goodbye" and highlights from *Dirt Floor*, as well as previously unreleased demos and alternative mixes. In recent years, Chris had found romance and inspiration in Dresden, Germany. These days yielded some of his best work, with the albums *Hotel Vast Horizon* and *War Crime Blues*, as well as *Weed* (a set of solo remakes of early songs) and his only film score (for the German film *Pigs Will Fly*). In particular, *War Crime Blues* is a solo electric masterpiece of sympathy and antipathy by turns; such emotionally acute song suites are notably few and far between in the post-Iraq invasion era. The heartbroken title track, the raging desert storm of "God Left Town" and the Clash cover "The Call Up" serve as both salt and salve for collective wounds. Chris recorded *Soft Dangerous Shores* last year with a supple German rhythm duo, bassist Heiko Schramm and drummer

Matthias Macht. The album mixed deep-blues feel and rich jazz harmonies with erotic rhythm beds and electronic ambience. The idiom was the "universal blues," where the spirits of Robert Johnson and Jimi Hendrix, Keith Richards and Kraftwerk bond. "The blues sound different in different places," Chris said just prior to the disc's release. "But on a lonely, rainy night -- whether you're in New Orleans or New York or Dresden -- they feel the same." Like most bluesmen of any era, Chris had his share of hellhounds on his trail. He chased a lot of them down in song and on stage; other times, demons got the best of him. But whether up or down in his career, Chris's sweet, generous nature and pure sensibility earned him lifelong friends and, as he put it, "guardian angels." Although fully aware of his capabilities as a musician, Chris was a humble man, always cognizant of the standards set by his peers and predecessors. To sit with him backstage at a club or at a street-side caf in the West Village, it was soon apparent that he considered each admirer and well-wisher who came up, known or new, something of a gift. Chris recorded an a cappella rendition of the pop/jazz standard "Nature Boy" as the haunted close to War Crime Blues. The words may not be his, but his voice reveals wisdom hard-won over his time here: "The greatest thing you'll ever learn/Is just to love and be loved in return." -- Bradley Bambarger People who are interested in should consider this download.

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