

Mp3 Gurf Morlix - Diamonds To Dust

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Folk Blues Songwriter 11 MP3 Songs FOLK: Folk Blues, COUNTRY: Country Blues Details: Gurf Morlix

Diamonds to Dust Time was when the name Gurf Morlix just meant cool. Quality, too, but first and foremost, cool. Whos that? someone might ask at a show, pointing in awe at the poker-faced guitarist and harmony singer accompanying some songwriter with a taste in sidemen as impeccable as their own songs. Thats Gurf Morlix, another would answer, perhaps with an air of incredulity that anyone would have to ask in the first place. Man, hes cool, the inquirer would enthuse. Cool name, too. Later on, Morlixs name also become synonymous with grit and authenticity two words that neatly sum up the raw, ragged beauty of every album hes produced over the course of the last decade. Some producers fuss over polish and perfection, but survey the likes of such respected artists as Ray Wylie Hubbard, Slaid Cleaves, Mary Gauthier, Robert Earl Keen, Tom Russell and Troy Campbell, and theyll all tell you that you dont hire Morlix to get pretty; you hire him to get real. And maybe a little dirty, too; not for nothing did Hubbard title his second Morlix-helmed album Growl, after the producers prime directive to put some growl on every track for maximum integrity and soul. All of the above cool, grit, growl, the works still very much apply when it comes to Morlix. But with the release of Diamonds to Dust, his fourth and best solo album, Morlix should henceforth be regarded as nothing less than one of the most compelling and formidable songwriters in his adopted home state of Texas, if not in all Americana music. Hes actually been a contender since his 2000 debut, Toad of Titicaca. Although Morlix insists that he put it out mainly as a concession to the musician peers who kept bugging him about needing to make a record of his own, such modesty could hardly obscure the albums simmering wit and almost frightening promise. Hell, if this journeyman sideman/producer could toss off an original song as kick-ass as Dan Blocker by casually goofing around with the cast list of Bonanza, who knew how good hed be if he ever really showed his guns? And both 2002s Fishin in the Muddy (boasting the bittersweet tour-de-force Torn in Two) and 2004s Cut N Shoot (a straight-up shot of classic, Hank-inspired honky-tonk) proved the debut was no fluke. Still, it always seemed like Morlix was holding something back. He released the albums with little fanfare, and apart from the almost dutiful CD-release shows, about the only time youd ever hear him

perform one of his songs publicly would be at the request of another artist he was playing with in his more familiar role as sideman (Hubbard, for one, became such a fan of Torn in Two, he ended up recording it himself). It was as if Morlix's self-confidence in his own ability had yet to catch up with his potential. Call it a hazard of always working with the best of the best, dating back to his salad days playing with such song poets as the late Blaze Foley and Lucinda Williams (for whom Morlix produced both 1988's bullet-proof Lucinda Williams and 1992's Sweet Old World, as well as the original, tumultuous sessions for what eventually became her breakthrough, Car Wheels on a Gravel Road but that's another story). I started writing songs in the early 70s, but man, did they suck, he offers dryly. Well, they didn't suck, but I'd write a song and think, OK, that's nice; that rhymes and that doesn't sound stupid. But then I'd compare it to a Lucinda song and think, I can never play this for anybody. So, despite the strength of the songs on his first three albums which had a lot more going for them than rhyming and not sounding stupid (Dan Blocker included) it wasn't until he penned Diamonds Blanket, inspired by the passing of his friends Warren Zevon and Chris Slemmer (a roadie from his Lucinda days) that Morlix truly felt he was on to something. That was the breakthrough, he says of Blanket, which is one of several songs on the new album graced by harmony vocals by the inimitable Patty Griffin. That was the one that made me realize I had started to get somewhere with the songwriting thing. And how. While Blanket, for obvious sentimental reasons, remains Morlix's personal favorite song on the record, every other track here from the opening death-row lament Killin Time in Texas (a co-write with Troy Campbell) through to the devastating Need You Now, is cut from the same highest-quality cloth. So much so, in fact, that Morlix's songs all hold their own next to the lone cover at the heart of the album, Bob Dylan's timeless With God On Our Side. As it turns out, what for years had been Morlix's biggest hang-up as a writer became his greatest asset. What I realized was, these people that I've been working with they're the benchmark, he says, acknowledging the whos who list of songwriters he'd formerly considered as out of his league. So I figured, I'd better raise the bar. After talking a lot about songwriting through the years with Lucinda and Ray Wylie and Slaid and Mary Gauthier, I finally put it all together. And I think on Diamonds to Dust, I finally had something to say, and I finally found my songwriting and my singing voice. Fact is, it was there all along it just took Morlix a lot longer to recognize it than everyone else around him. Just like he didn't quite realize how tightly the new songs all fit together as a cohesive statement until a friend pointed it out to him. I actually had all the songs finished, but I didn't have a title or a concept for it until I had (songwriter) Sam Baker come over and

listen to it, says Morlix. He sat there with his eyes closed and listened the whole way through. When the last song was done, he turned to me and said, OK, heres the deal: Heres the sequence, heres the title, and heres what your album is about. And he was completely right. Indeed, with its recurring themes of death, decay and impermanence, Diamonds to Dust is far and away the darkest album Morlix has ever made, or even worked on. But theres real beauty here, too, both in the songcraft and the performances (as delivered by Morlix, Griffin, drummer Rick Richards and harmonica player Ray Bonneville). And, best of all, Diamonds comes with the promise of more to come. Morlix, clearly on a roll, notes that hes already written a dozen new songs that he likes just as much as anything on the new record. And while hell undoubtedly continue to produce records for the competition, and even pull the occasional sideman gig when fancy strikes, for the first time in his long career (dating back to 1966, when he began playing rhythm guitar in rock bands as a teenager in his native Buffalo, NY), Morlix is ready to put his own music front and center. I started booking more shows a few years ago, just to conquer the fear of getting up there by myself, he says. And then I found out that I really liked it. And I really like playing these songs, because I know I can lean back on them. I know theyre strong, and they support me well. And Im finding out that other people are moved by them, too, so Im going to tour as much as I can with this record. And more Morlix, as any Gurf connoisseur can tell you, can only be one thing: cool. Diamonds to Dust Track By Track Killin Time in Texas Troy Campbell and I sat down to see if we could write something, and Troy had this line about killing time in Texas. I heard it and went, Oh, thats gotta be about the death penalty. And then we just sort of cobbled it together. As soon as the song was finished, I thought that it was really strong. We recorded it on his last record, Long in the Sun, too, but I didn't want to do anything similar to that with my version. So I gave his another listen and decided to stay in completely different areas, arrangement wise. Madalyns Bones I wrote that with my wife. Its about Madalyn Murray OHair (the founder of American Atheists, who was murdered in 1995). She had been on my radar since 1956, when they stopped people from praying out loud in grade school. When I moved to Austin, I found out that she lived here, too, though I never met her, I read and heard a lot about her. A lot of people didnt like her, but I respected her right to speak out. When they found her body, and her son, who became a born-again Christian, was going to give her a Christian burial, it really struck me that that was the last thing she would have wanted. Food, Water, Shelter Love After Katrina, I figured there was going to be a lot of songs about hurricanes. And I thought, theres going to be a lot of bad songs about the hurricane, so I better see

if I can write a good one. That's what I came up with. Blanket That was the first song on the record that I wrote, and then I started playing it, people started coming up and telling me they were moved by it, which had never happened to me before. It's about friends dying. There's a lot of people I know that have been dying, but it was kind of written for Warren Zevon, who I did a three-month tour with in 1990, and my friend Chris Slemmer. Diamonds to Dust When you title a record with the name of a song, that attaches a particular importance to that song that might or might not apply. But that one just happens to fit. It sort of summed up the record to me. With God on Our Side I learned that song about five or six years ago, when (Austin's) KGSR-FM had a Bob Dylan 60th birthday show/concert. And it wasn't long after that when it was getting to be time when we were about to invade another country. I thought, This is really an important song. First of all I found out I could sing it, and then when I started singing it in public, I found out how much it meant to me. That song, for some reason it gives me hope every time I sing it, even though there's not a lot of hope in there. But it does offer a glimmer of hope, I think. So I had to put it on the record, even though I knew Buddy Miller had already cut a version of it, too. But I think I had been doing it before him. I actually showed up at a festival in Holland that we were both playing, and he was going to sit in with me and I was going to sit in with him. And he said, What songs are you going to do? And I showed him my list and he said I'm doing that song! And I said, Well, OK. But I am too, and I'm playing before you, so it's up to you. He didn't play it that night. (Laughs) I've Got a Passion There's not much to tell there; it's pretty self-explanatory. It's just about being passionate passion, and borderline obsession.

Windows Open, Windows Close That's just, again, thinking about people coming and going. The Donny in the song is Donald Lindley, the drummer. It's also about my parents, and Blaze Foley, and, again, Zevon and Slemmer. Slemmer was a roadie who worked for Lucinda for a while when I was playing for her. He was just the greatest guy in the world, and then he was gone. And that's just kind of how it happens. It's a short movie, you know? Up Against It I've always listened to a lot of blues: Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, T-Model Ford. I like the primitive stuff that seems urgent. That song just popped out. That dirty sound comes out pretty naturally for me. I kind of like it to be as rough as it could possibly be. Worth Dying For That's another song with people dying in it. It was something that I read about, and I was sort of moved by it. Need You Now It's just sort of that essential cry for help, for trying to get what you need. It's extremely simple. It's a plea, you know, that might or might not get answered. I actually had the song finished and thought maybe there should be a harmony on there. So Patty Griffin came and did it, and hearing her

voice on it was pretty amazing. by Richard Skanse

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