

BUDDY

THE ORIGINAL TEXAS MUSIC MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 2014

VOLUME XXXXII, NUMBER 3

Building tension: *Building a Fire*

Shelley King is back with new *Building a Fire*

By Tom Geddie

SHELLEY KING IS BACK AND SHE'S *BUILDING a Fire* out of the fever of the passion of a man looking into her eyes. The flames are growing higher and she's telling him, "Gonna get yourself burned."

That's the title song on her new album, a consistently good collection of a dozen soul-gospel-American roots tunes influenced by the blues and some country. King wrote nine of the songs, co-wrote another, and covered two gospel songs, one of which is the centerpiece of the album.

She talked about the new album driving to a show in Knoxville via Atlanta, a conversation that began as the Infidels motorcycle gang roared past her on Interstate 20.

The slow, almost-aching traditional "I Know I've Been Changed," delivered in King's strong, sultry killer of a voice over full — but never overdone — music and backing vocals, defines *Building a Fire*.

"I went down to the river, the water was oh so cold, it chilled my earthly body . . . I know I've been changed, I know I've been changed, I know I've been changed, angels in heaven done signed my name."

King first heard the song on a YouTube recording suggested by her mother.

"I researched it and found videos of southern gospel churches incorporating it into sermons," she said. "It was so cool. It just got in my head a couple of days before we went into the studio and it permeated my thoughts. I was singing it constantly, even waking up in the middle of the night with it."

Setting the tone

WHEN SHE GOT INTO THE studio, she used the song to warm up vocally.

"It totally set the tone for the whole record," she said.

King has recorded 75-100 or so of her own songs on seven solo albums and some compilations and has another 20 or so waiting to be recorded. So it's unusual that the second most compelling song is her cover of Larry Campbell's "When I Go Away," the second gospel song on the album. She sings of church bells tolling early in the morning, of a hearse rolling down to the cold and gray graveyard where "the sun's going to shine through the shadows" when an orphan boy goes away to see his mother and father, bound for glory.

"It's a great song," King says. "I don't do many covers. When I do one, it's something really special that moves me."

Campbell originally wrote the

heading back up the East Coast to do a tour and I got in touch with Larry, who invited me back to the ramble.

A few days before the ramble, I was on the road and got a note that Levon was very ill in the hospital and there wouldn't be a ramble. "He passed away that week. I already had that time devoted to my schedule and planned to stay at a special place in Woodstock so I went there anyway. I tried to use that time to mourn Levon and have some time with myself as an artist and songwriter. I sat on the porch of this bed and breakfast trying to capture a song. I got a lot of descriptions, but never got a song. When I noticed this storm

cloud gathering over the mountains, sending light rays through the woods, I knew his song 'When I Go Away' and I started singing it that night to honor his memory."

In addition to the two gospels, *Building a Fire* includes a song about trying to live with grace and nine songs that somewhat cover the spectrum of love from the bad to the sometimes good to the perfect.

Highlights among the originals include the title song, the upbeat "Grace," "Things You Do," a co-write with Floramay Holliday about a man who drives her crazy, claiming "my friends tell me to stay away from you . . . it ain't the things you don't, it's

"The album does have this sexual tension, desire thing, and it has the spiritual thing. That's just how it came about. For me, what counts in a song is I want it to be as true as it can be. When I have somebody who tells me a song meant something to them, one of my songs maybe helped them through a hard time, that's the be all end all for me. That's why I do this."

—SHELLEY KING



She was the first woman to be named Texas State Musician: Shelley King

the things you do," and "1940s Eyes," a familiar fiddle romance about a woman whose voice "spilled out like honey on the table, like water washing by on a hot afternoon," and a handsome young World War II veteran who "held her hand down by the river and that night they danced like never before" and lived happily ever after.

The tension

THERE IS A TENSION BETWEEN the spiritual and the sexual in the songs, both natural elements in human nature.

"The album does have this sexual tension, desire thing, and it has the spiritual thing," King said. "That's just how it came about. For me, what counts in a song is I want it to be as true as it can be. When I have somebody who tells me a song meant something to them, one of my songs maybe helped them through a hard time, that's the be-all end-all for me. That's why I do this."

Connecting with the audience is essential. "It doesn't matter if I'm putting on the best performance, if I don't have that really special connection with them, then it doesn't matter," she said. "It's where we are all feeling the good energy. There are times when it's just right, especially when I'm playing with a band and we all hit our grooves and there's some magic that happens. Magic counts."

King, the first woman to be named Texas State Musician, did her first paying gig in 1989 or so.

"It took years to learn the ropes. Like 1996 or so is when I stopped being in bands and

started being Shelley King. Then I quit my day job in 1998 and started touring in 1999."

She has no trouble keeping her shows fresh whether she's doing a solo tour — which she is right now — or band shows or gigs with friends in Sis Deaville or Texas Guitar Women. *Building a Fire* is her second working with members of the Subdudes.

"Every show is different. Keeping lot of variety keeps it fresh," she said. "The joy of getting to follow my bliss every day. This is all I've ever wanted to do. Dang, I'm lucky. And happy about it."

She gigs three or four nights a week traveling all over the country, spending part of October on the East Coast and November on the West Coast. She's toured Japan twice and Europe, and in January is invited back to Delbert McClinton's Sandy Beaches cruise.

King grew up in Arkansas and Texas singing in churches, eventually beginning to write her own songs. She moved from Houston to Austin in 1992, working in sales and gigging at night before she got the nerve to quit the day job.

"I went in and quit my job and all the way home, I'm like, 'Oh my god, I must be crazy.' But I got on the phone and called everybody I knew and told them what I had done, and I booked 11 gigs that day," she said. She also formed her own label, Lemonade Records. Now she's building a fire. ■

Shelley King is scheduled to perform at Poor David's Pub in Dallas on October 26.