

CD REVIEWS

Folk

GARY SHEARSTON

Renegade

(Rouseabout Records)

★★★★☆

It is strange how, over the past 20 years, the idea of the “real Australia” as a rural setting peopled by folk with broad accents, laconic sensibilities and vigorous vernacular has almost disappeared. Macca on the ABC, John Williamson and Gary Shearston all seem like celebrations of a past disconnected from the urban majority.

If you approach this new collection of songs by the doyen of Australian folkies believing in the enduring power of “real Australia”, you will not be disappointed. Otherwise, this album of 16 original songs can be seen as an old man (Shearston is now 72) being nostalgic for a world that’s passed.

Here are marvellous songs about Shearston’s trouble-laden career (*Truth Is*), his deep affection for the artist Martin Sharp (*Paint Me a Painting, Painter*) and the great writer and folklorist Edgar Waters (*His Name Was Edgar Waters*), all



sung with Shearston’s distinctive flat delivery and saturated with Australian imagery.

One of the songs – *She’s a Classic* – is an inspired compilation of all the effusive hyperbole Aussie males use for objects of their admiration and desire – be it a ute or a member of the opposite sex.

Shearston is a genuinely great songwriter. His muse is not as sharp as it was when he released *Dingo* in 1974 but anyone who can write something as persuasive as *And a Butcherbird Overhead Sang*, a very Australian song about suicide, is a national treasure.

Bruce Elder

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