

## *Lucky That Way*

**Wayne Hamilton**

**Acoustic Vision Productions**

**Released in 2000**

**12 tracks**

The music is finely crafted and easy listening, but at root the songs of Wayne Hamilton are about story. Returning to music after a lengthy hiatus during which he had been performing, directing, and teaching live theatre, Hamilton brings to this recording substantial acting skills. These skills combined with his resonant voice and supported by some excellent musicians give his performance substance and depth.

A central element of American music has always been story. Whether the folk stories of Huddie Ledbetter and Woody Guthrie, the teen angst of Chuck Berry or the Bryants, or the more obvious storytelling of Jimmy Dean, C. W. McCall, or Tom T. Hall, since the nation was born America has been a land of storytellers. Is it any wonder that modern musical theatre was born and flourished in the United States? Yet, during the last two or three decades, as popular music and theatre has become increasingly homogenous, the American storyteller has become an endangered species.

It's not all doom and gloom. In the past year, I have received a number of recordings by artists who fall firmly into the tradition of the American storyteller. Whether it's the coming of the millennium, the current political climate, or some other factor, something has caused a resurgence of the storyteller's art in America. While there are tellers of story in Canada and around the world, there is something in the art of the American storyteller that sets it apart. It would be a shame to see this art die out.

The songs of Wayne Hamilton are strongly lyric based. Although this recording has a certain folky edge, Hamilton's background in popular music and live theatre shines through. Each song is a story simply told, like a transition in a Broadway play or an old cowboy song. Hamilton's vocal style is clean and evocative, breathing life into his tightly written stories of ordinary people. Take away the professional musical arrangements and one might imagine Hamilton sitting by a campfire, a small but interested group of campers listening at his knee.

Hamilton's music would fit well into an easy listening format on radio. Even when it rocks, it's quiet and comfortable. The style is broad and eclectic, drawing from several genres, yet the sound is unified and cohesive. If I were to assign the music on this release an overall category, I would say it is an updated version of the country and rhythm and blues based rock ballads of the late Fifties.

The guitar intro to "Looking For You" sets up a slow rock and roll mood that is enhanced by the soft blues bass line and sweet rollover of the piano behind Hamilton's rock waltz melody. Although they are not there, the listener can feel the presence of doowop backup vocals trying to slip in behind Hamilton.

"Eye to Eye" features Rebekka Fisher in a duet with Hamilton. This is another slow rocker, but with a bit more of an edge to it. This song has very much the same sound and feel as those classy duets sung by Brook Benton and Dinah Washington. This is cool jazzy rock and roll.

"The Cookie Lover's Ramble" is a mid-tempo shuffle that injects humour into this set, telling the story of the growing (especially in the derriere) love of two people who are as drawn to cookies as they are to one another.

Many songwriters write songs loaded with clichés. That's usually a bad thing. "Pappy's Pithy Phrases" demonstrates that Wayne Hamilton has the talent to turn this potential problem into a positive and humorous tale. Between the nature of this tale and the banjo in the background, this song takes on a decidedly country flavour.

Several of Hamilton's songs have a country sound, although it's the older, folkier country sound as opposed to the sound of today's country music. "I wonder if She's Mine" exemplifies Hamilton in this mode. Here is a touching story of reminiscence and regret, of a past not to be retrieved. The melody has echoes of Ian Tyson's "Four Strong Winds" and, as Hamilton sings it, very much the emotion given "Scarlet Ribbons" by Harry Belafonte. This sad, sweet song is sure to appeal to a broad audience.

"The Wooden Floor" is one of those classic American family histories that attaches to an object (a four poster bed, a rocking chair) as metaphor for the resilience of the family through the years. In this case, the anchor of the tale is "those planks that made the floor" of the family home, "the first house in the county that could boast a floor of wood." This fifty year family history is simply and sensitively told.

The combination of Hamilton's writing and vocal skills with the fine musicianship of his band make *Lucky That Way* a comfortable, enjoyable listen. While none of these songs is likely to make the charts, they should have no problem making drive time radio.

For those who may be interested, more information on Wayne Hamilton and his songs can be found at [www.waynehamilton.com](http://www.waynehamilton.com).

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[www.communication.ca/soundbytes](http://www.communication.ca/soundbytes)