

The cover sticker's testimonies from Kris Kristofferson and Todd Snider, along with the LPs strewn around in the cover photo, set high expectations for Peter Cooper's song craft. Mission Door doesn't disappoint. In fact, Cooper easily exceeded anything I anticipated.

Cooper wrote or co-wrote ten of the set's twelve songs. Eric Taylor, one of those rare songwriters whose work approaches literature, wrote the other two. The Taylor songs are a memorial to Charlie Rich ("All the Way to Heaven") and the title track, which features Peter sharing verses with Taylor's ex-wife Nanci Griffith and Todd Snider. Both songs are utter pearls with real depth. If Cooper takes Taylor as an exemplar he's aiming high indeed... but these two songs fit comfortably with his own.

Peter has a real knack for a turn of phrase that snags your ear. The astonishing "Couple of Lies" spins on the refrain line, "He told a couple of lies, but the rest was true." "715" is the story of Hank Aaron's baseball career, a tribute to excellence and elegance in the face of racism. The closer, "Thin Wild Mercury," relates the time Bob Dylan booted Phil Ochs from a limo after Phil panned Dylan's new song. Dylan dismissed Ochs with, "You're not a writer. You're a journalist." "Take Care" is inspired by Townes Van Zandt's brilliant, harrowing songs, especially "Lungs." Strong stuff.

Cooper produced Mission Door with pedal steel great Lloyd Green, and they did a very nice job. Green provided strong instrumental support on all but three cuts, and guitarist/harmonist Bill Lloyd's work on six also stands out. This is one delicious album. Check out Peter Cooper and his vivid songs.

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