



John Prine is back and I'm happy as a clam. If ever there was an artist who deserved more acclaim, it's him. "Fair & Square" is his first album of new material in ten years and during that time he's come through a disfiguring fight against a cancerous growth on his neck. The treatment caused his voice to go slightly lower, forcing him to sing his older songs in another key. In doing so, he says he's discovered them all over again and that rejuvenation has clearly had a similar effect on his new songs. He's so much more relaxed and rootsy.

The Instrumentation is about as basic as it gets, acoustic guitars, bass, drums a little pedal steel, a little accordion or Hammond B3. Combine that with background vocals by Mindy Smith and Alison Krauss and all you need are some of his instantly sing-along-able songs right? Inspired perhaps by what he's been through recently (he has also started a family in the past ten years) he's come up with one of his best collections of songs ever.

The song that will get the most attention will probably be "Some Humans Ain't Human." His political diatribe in the final verse puts him squarely in a blue state mindset, but what else would you expect from a guy who came from the anti-war folk protest of the early 70's? He incorporates a wealth of off-beat characters as always but most of his songs now are sung in the first person. The difference in his voice is almost unnoticeable except for the more laid back style it brings about. It's been ten years since we've heard new songs from John Prine but "Fair and Square" makes those years "just flow by, like a broken down dam."