

New Voices, Old Influences

By Kevin C. Madigan

Pieta Brown • *Remember The Sun* (One Little Indian)



Devoid of pretense, Pieta Brown has a voice that comes from behind, taps you on the shoulder and tells you a secret. *Remember The Sun* finds this fine young artist taking elements of folk and blues and spinning a striking set of songs, rendered with quiet confidence.

The daughter of folk singer Greg Brown, she comes by her talent naturally. Raised in Iowa, Brown has led a somewhat bohemian existence ever since, traveling the country and soaking up different sounds and cultures. In the song “In My Mind I Was Talkin’ To Loretta,” Brown raises some poignant questions: “Just what’s a woman supposed to do? / be a mamma and a lover / break down under cover / get fixed up / and make a living too?” But not every song is moody introspection. “Sonic Boom” rocks with fierce intensity, and “Not Scared” is a defiant declaration of self-reliance.

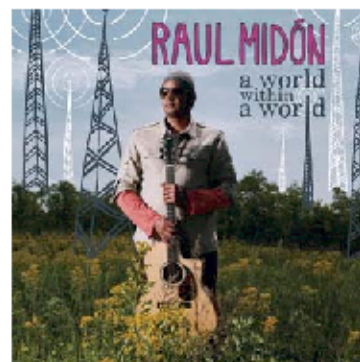
Executive producer Chris Goldsmith brings his lofty experience with the Blind Boys of Alabama, Ben Harper and Charlie Musselwhite to the proceedings. A real treat is the tasty guitar picking of Bo Ramsey, known for his work with Lucinda Williams and something of a cult figure in roots music. This lanky minimalist co-produced the record.

Raul Midón • *A World Within a World* (Manhattan)

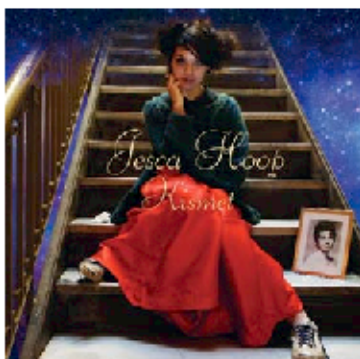
Born in New Mexico, Raul Midón developed his impressive skills as a singer, songwriter and guitarist in the melting pot that is Miami, singing back-up vocals for the likes of Shakira and Julio Iglesias while doing small gigs in the city’s clubs. A graduate of the University of Miami’s prestigious jazz program, Midón yearned to establish himself and make his own records “instead of being someone else’s hired gun” as he explains on his website.

Midón wears his influences well. His father, an Argentinian, may well have inspired the use of traditional Andean pipes used in the song “Tembererana,” which is reminiscent of Paul Simon’s version of “El Cóndor Pasa.” The funky “All The Answers” borrows a page or two from Stevie Wonder’s book, as does “Song For Sandra,” a lament on his deceased mother. “Ain’t Happened Yet” is pure acapella, taking its cues from Bobby McFerrin’s singular style. Midón, who has been blind since birth, sings the song “Caminando” in Spanish and relates the challenges that he faced when walking to his grandmother’s house as a child.

The final track is “Peace on Earth” and, as he states in the sleeve notes, “it has become clear to many of us that we don’t all want it.”



Jesca Hoop • *Kismet* (Columbia)



“I made the record that I wanted to hear.” So says this intriguing musician about *Kismet*, a surprising and diverse collection of sonic discovery.

In a vein similar to the very clever Imogen Heap, Hoop likes nothing more than experimenting with sounds and ideas. Working for five years as nanny for the children of Tom Waits, she was bound to pick up some strange notions. Mix that with her love of chamber music, gospel, slave songs, dance hall, early 20th-century jazz and murder ballads and you’re going to get interesting results.

The songs are intricate, structured seemingly according to whim, with oddities like “Intelligentactile 101” and “Havoc in Heaven” standing out. The poetry of her lyrics is worth noting—from the nonsensical wordplay of “Out The Back Door” (“We waltzin on water dippin lucy liu / and all the flames flicker red and then blue”) to the sad longing of “Love and Love Again” (“My heart it grew dark dear / with you not here / and the cold wind / is all that would dance me / round my floor.”)

Worthy of Mention: Patty Griffin’s *Live From The Artist’s Den* (ATO) is a terrific DVD of a New York concert. The series *Under Review* (MVD) continues, now featuring biographical DVDs of Nick Drake, Bruce Springsteen, The Byrds, Keith Richards and Neil Young.

Kevin C. Madigan writes about music and other artistic matters from his home in Atlanta.