

Mp3 Laurel Brauns - Periphery



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"Elegantly arranged modern folk-pop with a dash of 70's songwriters influence, laurel's second album is collection of stories-in-song laced with georgeous layers of violin and cello." - jeff saltzman 10 MP3 Songs

FOLK: Folk Pop, POP: Folk Pop Details: Laurel Brauns From years of busking on the streets of Galway, Ireland, to entertaining skiers in the lodges of New England, to playing at some of Boston's loudest bars, Laurel Brauns has learned the art of silencing a crowd. Performing Songwriter called Laurel's voice "heavenly and haunted . . . like a ghost off the moors" and heralded it as "an arresting, powerful force" (April 2003). Laurel's first album, *Swimming*, was recorded in 2001 in the basement of her college music building and, over the course of the next year and a half, sold nearly 2,000 copies and received national media attention. The fourth track, a story-song about a retired coast guard Laurel met outside a bus station in Salt Lake City, won Best Celtic Song at the Just Plain Folks Awards for its strong balladry and ghostly Irish arrangements of uilleann pipes, fiddle, and pennywhistle. On her new album, *Periphery*, Laurel established her own record label, Red Trail Records, and choose to record in Jackpot!, one of Portland's most renowned independent studios and home to legendary engineer Larry Crane (Elliot Smith, Sleater-Kinney). Besides his engineering duties on *Periphery*, Crane also agreed to co-produce the album with Laurel. Their partnership turned out to be highly gratifying. Crane says of the project, "I have worked with many run-of-the-mill songwriters, and Laurel Brauns is not one of them. Her intricate guitar playing, thoughtful and passionate lyrics, and clear voice were a treat to record." Making *Periphery* wasn't cheap, however, so in the summer of 2003 Laurel took a job in Alaska to work off the debt she had amassed. "Pretty much I lived in a tent to pay off this album," she says, and it's the truth: she spent three months in Denali National Park, working at a restaurant by day and playing songs for visitors by night. *Periphery*'s lush arrangements of strings, piano, drums and bass can be attributed to Laurel's new band,

Queen Anne's Lace, which formed for the express purpose of recording the album and playing gigs around the Portland area. Periphery's full band sound and unconventional stories mark a step a way from straightforward folk. Laurel says her approach to songwriting has changed substantially in the last few years: "Now I'm less willing to feel sorry for myself or be self-righteous," she says. "Most of these new songs are left unsettled and unresolved. They emphasize the gray areas and leave room for possibility." At the center of the new album, both thematically and schematically, is "Backroads," perhaps Laurel's most political song to date. Written partially as a response to 9/11 and the ensuing so-called War on Terror, "Backroads" blends the personal and political so adroitly that it's hard to tell the difference between the two. Ostensibly it is the story of a cross-country car trip that Laurel made in 2002. But the song's scope broadens gradually as it moves along, like a movie camera zooming out, panning across the ravaged modern American landscape. "Backroads" becomes, ultimately, a new kind of National Anthem, a radical "Star Spangled Banner" for the rest of us: the bike messengers and bellboys, the office temps and baristas, the dishwashers and cubicle-confined working stiffs-all of us who find ourselves on the periphery of this "kingdom of highways, strip malls, and SUVs." In the song's chorus, Laurel promises, "I'll take the backroads, I'll take the backroads," repeating the line again and again and asking finally, pleadingly, "Will you meet me there?" It is one of Periphery's most hopeful and rousing moments. Amid so much longing, loss, and emotional starkness, the plea that Laurel Brauns makes for a new kind of community and a new definition of patriotism feels especially moving-and, these days desperately needed.

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