

# Mp3 Josephine Cameron - American Songs



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Josephine Cameron plays original and well known songs that straddle the line between pop and folk idioms. She is most highly praised for her clear, expressive vocal style. 11 MP3 Songs FOLK: Traditional Folk, GOSPEL: Traditional Gospel Details: Face Magazine: September 2002 Josephine Cameron on a sunlit December morning conceals something of the loneliness in her music. A Wisconsin native and on-again resident of Brunswick, Maine, Cameron released her debut of eleven American standards in early 2002, and though "hope" and "home" are everywhere throughout American Songs, her heart is surely broken. "I'm drawn to melancholy like you wouldn't believe," she admits with a smile, recalling in conversation such influences as George Gershwin and Antonio Carlos Jobim. I am not surprised, by her demeanor or her melancholy, and can only marvel at the many facets of artistry. American Songs is a plaintive thing, and its opening-"Wayfaring Stranger"-the hungriest of a precise and searching catalogue. Most of the songs are nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century ballads from forgotten authors, including "Red River Valley" and "Shenandoah." "Just A Wearyin' for You," by Carrie-Jacobs Bond and Frank Stanton, recalls Townes Van Zandt in its frayed simplicity, and A. P. Carter, credited for "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," haunts the album proper. In liner notes inside a cover of summer clouds over low hills and evergreen, Cameron writes of a "longing for home," the hoped-for repose of the roving American, and our inevitable distance from it. Her voice is at all times sad. I make much of a self-professed songwriter's debut comprised entirely of other artists' material. Hearing "Red River Valley," I remember Bob Wills' Tiffany Transcriptions and an aged John Wayne in Howard Hawks' Red River. Tall orders for any newcomer. Ry Cooder made a career of recording standards with the best musicians in their respective fields, but I think of this only after Cameron tells me about performing "Goodnight Irene" in South Bend, Indiana, and about aging men in attendance who would thank her for the song afterwards.

Ry Cooder's "Goodnight Irene"-with the lilting accordion of Flaco Jimenez-is great comfort in Maine winters, and American Songs echoes its delight in our vernacular music. Indeed, enthusiasts are everywhere. Lucinda Williams' 1978 debut, too, without an original composition, is an exercise in reverence, and Williams' melancholy, like Cameron's, is undeniable. Despite the jazz singers Cameron invoked as heroes over coffee-Anita O' Day, Peggy Lee-American Songs plays out like the blues. If, as Cameron says, jazz musicians "can hear a lot more," and if she is drawn to melody before lyrics, her triumph on American Songs was to go it alone, without accompaniment, and to choose songs that would still be bruised if spoken. Josephine Cameron's voice in conversation is sweet, without the goodbye timbre of her recordings. Her vocal talent she claims to share with four sisters, although her formal training includes only the piano (which she left at sixteen) and the guitar. American Songs began amid plans to teach, with the revelation of reaching forty-five years and wishing she'd been a singer. "I didn't want to have that resentment," she says. Returning to Brunswick from South Bend with a husband two and a half years ago, Cameron resumed guitar lessons and researched her debut. Cameron's sources for American Songs were not recordings at all, but bound anthologies of folk compositions from college and city libraries. Some she had tried at campus performances, first as an undergraduate at Bowdoin College, then, more seriously, while earning her Masters at Notre Dame. A sense of history-"what it meant to people in the 1800s, what it meant in the 1900s"-bolstered by occasional chance ("Just A Wearyin' for You" appeared inside a used book bought for collages) secured the rest. For a year and a half, off and on, Cameron recorded at Studio Dual in Cape Elizabeth with engineer John Etnier and producer Anthony Walton. There is romance in her cracked Taylor small-body guitar, and her sessions seem characterized by successes. Changes by Etnier were limited to suggestions-"let's listen to this again"-and Cameron's request for a back porch feel is rendered neither saccharine nor derogatory in execution. What is evident throughout, in conversation and in song, is the American spiritual as homecoming. Hymns of my Presbyterian youth in South Texas were so homogenized by well-meaning congregations without sense of pitch or harmony that a chance discovery of the 1950s Gospel quintet the Soul Stirrers while in college reinvented Sunday mornings. As parishioners were inspired to religious ecstasies ("Sister Flute" they called women fainting in the aisles) the Soul Stirrers sang of a future Heaven their voices corroborated. But listen to the Stirrers perform Thomas Dorsey's "Peace in the Valley," in which, despite their jubilation, a change has not yet come. Josephine Cameron concludes American Songs with "Peace in the Valley,"

wearied and still, and the inherent sadness is no less comforting. Now in her mid-twenties, Cameron has been writing since sixteen: fiction and poetry and, these days, songs. Emotion is her artistic barometer, and jazz is "probably what I listen to most," she insists, citing recent work with an Austrian double-bass player in Portland who will likely record with her on her second album. A poem cycle about folk music is mentioned as a work in progress, but the musician in Josephine Cameron is clearly focusing on song: violin solos, original compositions, and more modern influences-musical contemporaries whose works inspire the same urgency as those in American Songs. I am inclined to offer caution, against shaking off too much dust, and shoring up the empty spaces. Nostalgia is absent from American Songs because Cameron can convey the "sly honesty" of "His Eye is on the Sparrow" and the catharsis of "Careless Love" with equal perception. Even alone, they are beautiful songs. But she knows this, surely, and not age but relevance makes them so. In any future assessment of Josephine Cameron's work, I cannot think of a better place than American Songs to begin. Nathan Paul Kosub

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