

Mp3 Jewelia Owens - A Quick Look Back



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Completely unique - kinda jazzy, kinda bluesy but not like anything you've heard before. 7 MP3 Songs

FOLK: like Ani, FOLK: Modern Folk Details: THE JEWELIA OWENS BAND TAKES CENTER STAGE

-SALEM MONTHLY REVIEW BY BETHANY CUNNINGHAM A crackle of anticipation whips through the cold Salem Saturday night. The difficulty finding a parking spot near the Blue Pepper is the first sign that something is going on. That something is The Jewelia Owens Band. Free coffeehouse music in Salem is often hit-or-miss. Very hit-or-miss, in fact, with good groups drawing single-digit crowds and off-key soloists drawing rowdy throngs. But sometimes everything coalesces: singer, venue, and crowd. With that jolt of synchronicity, the crowd at the Blue Pepper seems acutely aware that they are watching something big. Then Jewelia Owens starts warbling a hypnotic love song, drawing out long, low notes until they weep and all the crowd can do is close their eyes and nod. The Blue Pepper is overflowing with people, and yet when this sprite of a girl-woman picks up her violin and begins to sing, there is silence, absolute silence. Belying her huge singing voice, Jewelia seems unsure how to greet such reverence, laughing with the nervousness that conveys that something is still very new here. In her wispy honesty, she seduces the crowd better than any veteran of between-song-small-talk. Her band seems to recognize too that they are a part of something, gathering momentum from the growing crowd. They turn folk ballads into jazz improv into swing refrains back into folk ballads with effortless ingenuity. This is something worthy of a Norah Jones album or a Diana Krall concert, and the crowd seems to implicitly recognize that this could be one of those I-knew-them-when moments. The foursome has been together for three short months with limited practice space and time, but an abundance of talent getting them this close to something. The elusive something will get closer for the group in January when they cut a demo and begin plans for a west coast tour beginning in February. Sounding more like an MBA than a songbird,

Jewelina explains that each step the group takes is designed to lead to another. The demo to the tour to a possible CD to something big. Backed by her uber-supportive family, the girl who took up violin 11 years ago to get out of math class has a clear vision for her future. The South Salem High graduate has convinced fellow South graduates Erich Von Trapp and Chad Hammer to buy into the vision. Von Trapp plays drums, has already heard all of the Sound of Music jokes, and has been through several bands with Owens already in her quest for something. Hammer, the friend-of-a-friend who plays upright bass provides a loose, relaxed vibe for the group with his mellow strumming and easy improv. Guitarist Michael Dongug is the fourth piece of the puzzle, his boyish looks melding easily into this group of 20-somethings, despite the fact that he has a teenage daughter. He sought Owens and Von Trapp out after seeing her perform at the Dragonfly Coffee Co. a few times. Finding space and time to practice has been their biggest challenge to date. With so many work schedules to balance, the group hasn't had a chance to find adequate studio space to rent. The coming west coast tour will also have to work around work schedules, with members exchanging vacation days for tour dates. While the group plans to stay true to what Hammer calls their neo-folk roots, the group is also clearly a work in progress. Currently, they play a set of songs which Owens wrote as guitar/violin pieces for herself, with the band layering their parts in. Asking one's backup musicians to create their own parts with very little practice seems like a huge leap of faith, but the gamble pays off for Owens who benefits from the group's improvisations and riffs. Owens continues to write new material as she achieves more confidence both as a performer and a songwriter. The next evolution of the group will take place after their tour, as Hammer leaves for Germany in March. The group seems confident that they will replace Hammer and continue moving forward. Moving forward seems to be the only alternative for the train that is the Jewelina Owens express. She could be in L.A. right now, pounding the pavement, or in Seattle, or Portland seeking greater exposure, more chances of something happening. But instead, she is here in Salem, sending crackles of anticipation and knew-you-when wherever she goes. Because something is happening, of that there can be no doubt.

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