

Mp3 Susan Herndon - 1,000 Pies



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".the pop sensibilities of Sheryl Crow, the lyrical prowess of Joni Mitchell and Rickie Lee Jones, the swagger of Chrissy Hynde and the elegance of Emmylou Harris." 11 MP3 Songs FOLK: Folk-Rock, POP: Folky Pop Details: Comfort Food Susan Herndon serves her best yet with 1,000 Pies BY GARY HIZER

For years now, Susan Herndon has been likened to such lauded female artists as Joni Mitchell and Rickie Lee Jones, and, truth be told, the comparisons aren't unfounded. Herndon is something of a trailblazer, unfettered by labels or boundaries, skipping with ease between genres and showing hints of her inner bohemian. The fact that she often sings in French as well (to the dismay of a few and delight of many more) only adds to her already eclectic and independent image. While the comparisons are highly complimentary, focusing too much on her similarities to such iconic female songwriters is to overlook the most elemental factor of Herndon's appeal: quite simply, she has one of the sweetest and most comforting female voices in Tulsa music. Of course it doesn't hurt that she's also a gifted songwriter, but would we really care if it wasn't so pleasant to listen to her? With her latest CD, 1,000 Pies, Susan continues to refine her craft as she presents perhaps her most concise and cohesive album to date. Even as she glides between styles, touching on roots rock ("At the End of the Day"), jazz ("On My Way"), country ("There Is No End to My Love For You") and smoldering blues-rock ("King's River"), the disc never sounds disjointed as Herndon sings from the heart and paints a picture of the people, relationships and landscape around her. Clocking in at just over 39 minutes with 11 tracks, 1,000 Pies isn't the sweeping overture that Susan's 2005 double disc release, Peccadillos, was, but that's by design. "I love a great, 10-song CD," Herndon told me recently. "A couple of my friends and I were talking about that: how you don't want to take it off, you just want it to play over and over and over if it's really good." With that conversation in mind, the goal of the new CD was to create an album that wouldn't overstay its welcome

but instead leave the listener wanting just a little more. And to great extent, that is what Herndon has accomplished with this current disc. Primarily accompanied by her current backing band, The Painkillers (guitarist Jeff Graham, bassist Dave White and drummer Michael Steed), as well a few choice guests such as Tom Skinner, Don Morris and Jack Abraham, Herndon is obviously among friends on this album--and it shows in the strength of her performance. There's a certain swagger present, evident not only in the Pretender's-like groove of "World Class Wallower," but also in the bluesy smolder of "King's River" and even the disc's stirring closing ballad "Highway 33 (Home)." Boondogs drummer Dylan Turner recently told Herndon, "It's a great foil for a folk artist to have a rock'n'roll band behind you." But is that what Susan considers herself--a folk artist? Or simply a singer/songwriter? "Definitely more a songwriter," she said, adamantly. "I don't think about the other stuff because the songs dictate (the style)." Perhaps that's what leaves some listeners a tad bewildered when they first encounter Herndon. Styles and genres blend seamlessly and without much thought in her songs. She definitely has a jazzy bent and has even played within Tulsa's jazz circles, but she frequently sits in with Skinner and others in the revered Red Dirt community where the honesty and lyricism of her songs fit so well. When asked how she fell in with the Red Dirt crowd, Susan answered, "It's a fateful thing, I think. It's just something I'm drawn to." She even joked that when people ask what genre of music she plays, she answers "Red Dirt-Jazz" and that's sure to ruffle feather with the more uptight in each musical community. Nevertheless, Herndon has found a happy middle ground where she can exercise her more jazzy tendencies while touching on country, blues, rock and anything else that finds its way into her music. Where else would you find a French reading of Bob Dylan's "Girl of the North Country" next to the heartbreak and pedal steel of "There is No End to My Love for You"? Only Herndon can blend such disparate elements so well and leave a listener wanting more instead of running for cover. The key, truly, is in the honesty of Susan's songwriting. The stirring ballad "Highway 33 (Home)" ends up as the surprising showpiece of the new disc, featuring Susan's vocals and piano with a mournful cello as the song's character stirs up memories of the past, both good and bad, when recalling the loss of a grandparent's farm to eminent domain. Whether personally true or not, she delivers the lyrics in manner that hits close to the heart and draws an emotional response. Yes, the new album shows that Herndon possesses the pop sensibilities of Sheryl Crow, the lyrical prowess of Joni Mitchell and Rickie Lee Jones, the swagger of Chrissy Hynde and the elegance of Emmylou Harris. More importantly, though, it reaffirms Herndon's rightful place in Tulsa's

music scene as an extraordinary songwriter and one of the sweetest female voices in the region.

***** 1,000 Pies LINER NOTES As Ive followed and written about her career, Ive taken some delight in identifying Susan Herndon as the only Red Dirt musician who sings in French. Certainly, thats true even the French part. (Check out her take on Dylans Girl from the North Country, the only cover song on this disc.) And, like the Red Dirt boys who often accompany her, Susan lives and works out of Oklahoma, has both a respect and a facility for lyrics that mean something, and remains fiercely independent, unwilling to sacrifice art and passion at the altar of whats-happening-now commercialism. She also understands the uniqueness of her time and place, and with a few brilliant musical brushstrokes, celebrates it with her listeners. Songs like Here in the Heartland and Oklahoma Waters not only couldnt have come from anywhere but the places Susan knows, they also couldnt have come from anyone but Susan. Thats what makes this disc so special. There are plenty of singer-songwriters out there. I guess there are even some who sing in French (especially the ones from France). But no one does exactly what Susan Herndon does. Theres a literary term that you dont hear much these days, but it applies perfectly to Susan and 1,000 Pies. Its angle of vision, and it refers to the particular way that an artist sees his or her world and translates that vision to an audience. Susan Herndons angle of vision is like no one elses, and while she casts it here in a variety of settings from acoustic ballads to rockers to unabashed steel-guitar-driven country, all backed by some of the most noted musical figures Oklahoma has to offer, including producer Hank Charles theres always something that sets her songs apart. At times, listening to Susan Herndon can be as airy and soul-stirring as watching butterflies flutter over a field of wildflowers. At other times, she can rock so hard that it scares you. And at still other times, as in Home which contributes the lyric that gives this CD its name -- she can draw you into a situation that would be cliched in lesser hands and not only give you something fresh, but just about make you cry in the bargain. Throughout, Susan Herndon uses her words like any good poet, each one carrying a particular weight and density of its own. And then, she strings them together in that husky, intimate voice that sounds as though shes speaking directly to you often at around 3 a.m. Its as though shes synthesized the best qualities of Julie London and Joni Mitchell. One more thing: 1,000 Pies may be the mellowest of all her discs, but that doesnt mean it wont move you. In fact, it will probably reach places in you that you didnt know could be reached. Thats the power and art and angle of vision of Susan Herndon, and God bless her for it. -- John Wooley (Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame, Author, The

Colors of Oklahoma Music.)

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