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Records



Willie Tyson: "If they want white floors in heaven / Jesus gonna have to keep them clean."

DEBUTANTE By Willie Tyson Urana Records

In her second album, *Debutante*, Willie Tyson has sharpened her special blend of humor and irony. Whether she's singing about women being sold like cattle or comparing a broken heart to a car ("Even the junkman won't take me for parts,") her wit is cutting and at the same time gentle. Her timing, her range of expression and her Southern accent bring out the biting message of her lyrics.

In the title song, a Southern gentleman muses on his good luck having Red Satin, his prize-winning cow at a local cattle auction while his "fine Southern daughter-girl" is coming out at the local debutante ball. But Red Satin turns up at the ball while his daughter whirls into the auction to tell the cigar-smoking crowd that women will no longer be sold.

One of the best songs is "Levee Blues," Tyson's tribute to the women who cook and clean "so some asshole can sit on a levee in a clean white shirt and sing the blues."

The narrator reflects upon woman's work, life and death. Her pains have been unsung; they are too ordinary even for the blues:

*Ain't never sat on no levee,
But I sure can cry.
Yet she sees it all and remains wryly defiant:
And if they want white floors in heaven,
You know Jesus gonna have to keep them clean.*

Tyson says she mostly "writes the tunes to hang the words on." But on the blues cuts and "Witching Hour" the women musicians come into their own, and the music soars, equalling Tyson's powerful lyrics.

Her first record, *Full Count*, on her own Lima Bean label, was publicized mostly by word of mouth among feminists. Wise Women Enterprises is able to do

more promotion, but the record won't be found at every neighborhood record store. To order write *Urana Records, c/o Wise Women Enterprises, P.O. Box 297, West Station, New York, NY 10014.*

HAZEL DICKENS AND ALICE GERRARD Rouder Records

A lot of country music is about nostalgia for things lost—a relationship to the land, the warmth of the extended family, a friendly rural community and ever-elusive true love. Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard, two country musicians who've been singing together for years, know all about the sadness of what's gone.

But they look back on the mythic past portrayed in country music and see how the roles offered women—loyal wife, honky-tonk bar girl, saintly mother—constrict like a belt a size too small. So their music also looks forward with hope to a day of better ways between country men and newly strong country women.

Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard, their second album, includes material adapted from other country musicians as well as original songs. All the traditional themes are there. "When I loved you," with mournful Cajun-style fiddling in the background, tells of unrequited love. "West Virginia My Home" is a plaintive ballad about Appalachians forced off the land into midwest cities, and by extension, of anyone's homesickness, whether they miss the smell of honeysuckle or the rattle of an El train.

But other songs have new twists. "Ramblin' Woman" and "Banjo Picking Girl" celebrate women on the road to adventure while their home-loving men stay behind.

"Mama's Gonna Stay" is about mother love—but also about the frustration and isolation of a woman raising small children alone. She gets up at 5

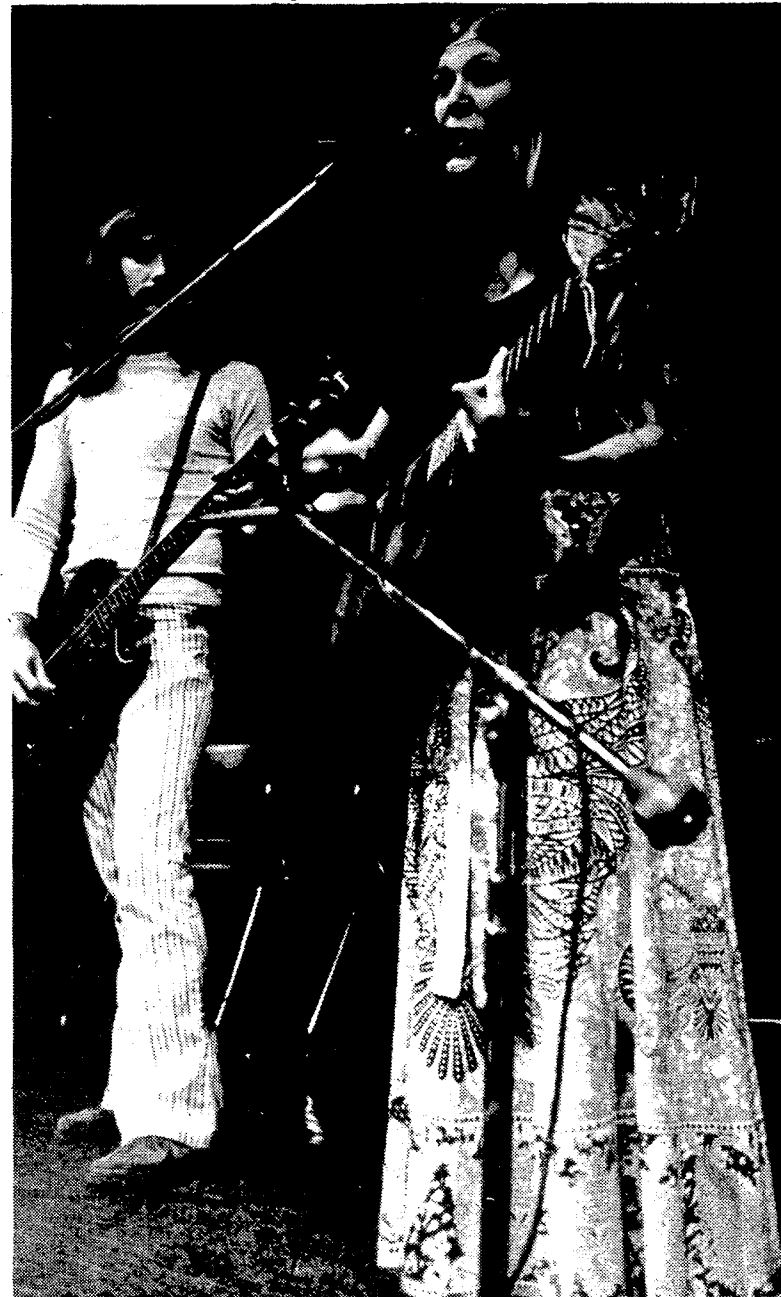
AM just for some time to herself:

*Before the world comes crashing,
And down the stairs comes true,
and smiles and tears and ratty hair
And "I can't find my shoes."
I don't know, Lord,
I don't know if I can make it through.*

Dickens' tenor and Gerrard's soprano swoop in and out of the harmonic dissonance of country blues. The backup musicians are superb, especially the rousing old-time banjos of "Banjo Picking Girl" and traditional dulcimer of "Beaufort County Jail." Liner notes let the listener in on where the songs came from and how they came to be arranged as they are. All in all, the album shows the seed of feminism flowering in the best of traditional country music.

Available from: Rouder Records, 186 Willow Ave., Somerville, MA 02144.

Kristen Lems and accompanist Tim Vear.



BALLAD OF THE ERA/FARMER WOMEN WALK MORE DETERMINED/MAMMARY GLANDS

By Kristin Lems
Carolstadt Productions

Kristen Lems is a singer, songwriter and organizer. She's one of the movers behind the annual Women's Music Festival in Champaign-Urbana, Ill., and an editor of the soon to be revived *Paid My Dues: a journal of women and music*.

In her concerts with Tim Vear, she sings about the viewpoint of the mother of a student killed at Jackson State, about how the '50s weren't really so great for teenagers, about women struggling to create new ways to live.

On her way to making an album, she's released two singles on her own label. One has "Ballad of the ERA," an easy sing-along that's become the anthem of the many demonstrations and rallies still going on in the unrattified state of Illinois. "Farmer" sounds like a simple, beautiful ballad, but it is also a powerful refutation of ERA foes who say all the necessary laws are already on the books. In many states, if the man of a husband/wife farm team dies, the wife must pay a large inheritance tax or the farm reverts to the state. "Farmer" catches a woman's spirit as she refuses to leave, insisting she's been a farmer, not just a farmer's wife, her whole life.

The other disc features "Mammary Glands," Lems' lighthearted but barbed view of American males' obsession with breasts and the damage thereby done to women.

In concert and on records, Lems' enthusiasm is what counts. Her songs take complex social issues and make them easy to sing about. Most important, she evokes within the issues unique and individual human pain, strivings and longings. She ties our most personal hopes and fears to the causes for which we fight.

—Judy MacLean

1163...

that's how many renewal notices we sent out this week... Make sure you don't miss even one issue of *In These Times*. Save us the computer and postage cost for additional mailings. We don't want to lose you.

Renew early.

MUSIC

Folk music as varied as life



Pete Seeger

Like the cultures and movements from which it springs, folk or people's music makes it own paths and can be found in many settings. This survey can only scratch the surface of a range of music as varied as life itself.

You can watch the street music theater of the Teatro Campesino organizing for the United Farm Workers in the fields of California, or listen to Holly Near in a large commercial hall singing songs the women's movement have called their own, or hear Bev Grant and the Human Condition rock out whose got "de fault" for default, at a small church fundraiser in New York City.

There are bluegrass festivals where the music goes 24 hours a day, on and off stage; intimate monthly concerts given by folksong societies all across the country, where for little cost you can get close to all kinds of music makers; clubs and coffee houses which cost more money and where the music may not be the most important event.

Weddings, birthdays, competitions and partying at home can be places and reasons for making "good times music." Often (as in the French Canadian communities of the Northeast) rock alternates with older dance styles for Saturday night fun.

What runs throughout is folk music's linkage with a sub-culture that runs counter to the American mainstream. It is participatory; you are usually expected to sing along, dance and eventually play at least one instrument. The best of it has the vitality that comes from generations of growing. It's not fancy, but it is fun.

For me, folk music has been a help in making it through difficult times and in enjoying good times more. Each person has made or needs to make their own connec-

tion. The worst mistake you could make is to listen only to those musicians you have heard or read about.

It helps to figure out where you normally feel good. Do you relish "people-watching" at demonstrations and love big crowds? Then, a concert in a large auditorium or a folk or bluegrass festival with an audience of 10,000 is really good. Do you like to mix drinks with your music? Then a tavern with Irish fiddles or a folk club with a fancy picking singer-songwriter would be preferable. A living room or small hall affords intimacy with a performer. If this is a main consideration, look to the folksong societies. Do you work so hard you hate to leave the house for music? Maybe buying records makes more sense than buying tickets.

Although people end up doing most or all of the above, there is just so much time and less money. There is a tremendous choice because folk music grows and changes and exists whether the big money is interested or not.

No single person can be knowledgeable and helpful about all the wonderful and awful stuff that is happening. There are more than 50 small recording companies that provide access to the most and the least interesting of today's performers, to political songs and a wide variety of traditional music. Every ethnic community has at least ten companies that record its music, popular and traditional.

In Folkways' superlative catalog of more than 1,700 records, Pete Seeger's best work is listed side by side with the tasteless recordings of family singers like the Bergerfolk. Broadside and Paradox offer a cross-section of topical song writers and the best from the radical movements around the world. Arhoolie, Delmark, Rounder and 20 others have cata-

Pete Seeger will headline an all-star folk concert for the benefit of the Old Town School of Folk Music, in Chicago, Sept. 3.

logs of reissues and new recordings.

Below is a list of minimal things to do to find out what is where:

1) **North American Folklore and Fiddlers Associations**, seven-page listing for nearest folk music activity of a not-for-profit nature. Free.

2. **North American Folklore and Folk Music Serial Publications**, eight-page listing for nearest publication which often has a calendar for commercial and non-commercial folk music concerts, clubs, and radio programs. Free.

Both of the above can be ordered from Joe Hickerson, Head, Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, DC 20540.

3. **Calendar of Festivals**, April, 1977 to December, 1977, 1,250 events listed by State in detail. Excellent guide to folk festivals, bluegrass gatherings, ethnic and Native American celebrations. Well worth the \$3.25 price from the National Council for the Traditional Arts, 1346 Conn. Ave., Washington, D.C. 20036.

4. **Sing Out!**, best and widest coverage of political music, traditional, ethnic and club music. Very helpful is Alan Senauke's column "What's Happening" and "Publication Noted" which lists an average of ten books and 60 records in each issue. Bi-monthly. \$7.00 for one year and \$12 for two years from Sing Out!, 270 Lafayette St., New York, N.Y. 10012.

—Josh Dunson

Josh Dunson writes on folk music for *In These Times*.

FILM

RoseGarden should have stood in book

I NEVER PROMISED YOU A ROSEGARDEN

Screenplay by Gavin Lambert

And Lewis John Carlino

Directed by Anthony Page

Produced by Michael Hausman

Rated R

I Never Promised You a Rose Garden is yet another film about another schizophrenic patient in another psychiatric institution. It is a shame that after waiting more than a decade for Hannah Green's penetrating novel to find its way to the screen, we are offered an unartistic, oversimplified movie that fails to communicate the original excitement and understanding of the book.

There were two things that seemed new, exciting and important in the novel. One was that the fantasy world into which Deborah retreated was as concrete as tables and chairs, as populated as any community you and I might know, totally real to her, right down to having its own language. The other thing was that the therapist accepted the world of Yr as real and useful. She kept reassuring Deborah

that she would not try to take it away from her. What the therapist did was help Deborah to make a choice between her own very punishing private place, and the world in which most of us move and live—which can also be very frightening.

It doesn't much matter whether a motion picture is true to a book as long as it works on its own terms and is successful as a film. But when the book is so satisfying and the film is unsuccessful, one begins to make comparisons, to carp and to criticize.

The time in both the book and the film is 1956. The 20 years since then have seen so much change in attitudes toward psychological illness, in broadened knowledge, in the rapid dissemination of new information, that it is impossible to jump from book to screen without taking into account that the frame of reference has changed. For example, in 1956 tranquilizers were not routine in mental hospitals, so restraining Deborah in wet sheets was not as thoughtlessly brutal as it seems today. To make the film effective and exciting the writer and director would

have had to work in the new framework. Not so—they were too faithful, in their own fashion.

One of the interesting aspects of the novel is the way Deborah slips in and out of her fantasy world. The "real world" is often grayer and vaguer than the land of Yr. Dramatizing this in film is an almost impossible task. Fantasy is the most difficult of all concepts to portray in such a realistic medium. A writer can say that Anterabbae (fantasy figure) had hair of flame, and the reader is content with the mind's image. But the film maker must supply the rest of the body: legs, arms, hands, face, gestures, parts that are of no consequence at that moment and sharp details that transform fantasy to reality and therefore no longer serve the purpose of fantasy.

Peter Brook managed it once on film in *Marat/Sade* when the inmates of the asylum grew very agitated and started to dance. The figures are transformed into wraiths that turn and twist in the light of the windows, no longer human shapes. You know that each has taken off into his own fantasy

sphere, propelled by the general excitement. In *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* the fantasies are specific and vulgar. The figures which mock and taunt Deborah ride horses, have streaming hair and flying cloaks and set the audience laughing when they appear. They are a costumer's delight and an artist's despair.

There is no security in madness for the screen Deborah. In the book Yr is a refuge from a world that has been too harsh and chaotic for the girl to bear. It also has stages, levels of isolation into which Deborah can withdraw. Without this the therapy is less understandable.

My quarrel is with the writers of the screenplay, producer Michael Hausman, and director Anthony Page—not with the actors. Despite a script that seems to miss the understandings of the book, the actors do their very best, and it is sometimes very good.

Kathleen Quinlan (of *American Graffiti*) plays Deborah Blake, the 16-year-old schizophrenic. She is the best thing in the film. Bibi Anderson (always

outstanding in Ingmar Bergman's films) has a drab part as the doctor who listens and looks sympathetic. She is totally miscast. The doctor of the book was a plump little Viennese, a warm, housekeeper-like woman.

With the exception of Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly*, most fiction films about mental illness and its treatment overdramatize and/or foreshorten the therapy so that "cure" seems a matter of faith healing instead of the long, painstaking process it is. It seems to be the spectacular, bizarre behavior that attracts the film maker—the stomach-turning sight of slit wrists or cigarettes pushed into unfeeling arms.

There is no virtue in making a film about mental illness, fact or fiction, unless one promotes understanding, a sympathy and compassion. Although the makers of *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* were undoubtedly earnest, they were not artists enough to lift the film above the pedestrian.

Mavis Lyons

Mavis Lyons is a film editor in New York and the regular film critic of *In These Times*.