

Jen Hajj – I OF THE STORM (Own Label, no catalogue number)



It's a coincidence that both this and Cera Impala's album (received at roughly the same time and reviewed in tandem) contain a cover of In The Pines – and Jen's version feels altogether more authentic, even though it's probably taken a shade too fast and doesn't quite fit with the tenor of Utah-based Jen's own gently compelling songwriting, at least as exemplified here. Jen's opening gambit, the affectionate, honest and direct Where You Take Me, may probably be regarded as one of the best of the batch, and it's enhanced by a harmonious backing vocal from Rex Seabury. The disc's other self-penned songs continue in much the same vein, exploring her own

qualities as a human being in optimistic and uplifting language that's as often inspirational as it is whimsical. The humble, personal sentiments of Thank You are equally honestly expressed. Jen can be heard to possess much of the folksy charm of early Judy Collins, and on occasion even sounds quite like her – check out I Am Home for instance – while the gentle timekeeping of Naptime is as hard to resist as the clear, pure reverence of Alleluia, both exceedingly attractive compositions. On the other hand, the stronger, more feisty song In The Beginning tends more to evoke the incantatory delivery of Buffy Sainte-Marie, and the bluesy Water On The Wasteland also receives an extremely persuasive vocal performance that shows off Jen's versatility in that department. I also really liked the childlike nature-poem Rain, with its wordless sitar-and-tabla mantra. Jen's select support crew does a nice line in bluegrassy-folk styling, with Ken Sager's dobro and Mary Danzig's fiddle arguably the stars of the show, at any rate as regards instrumental dexterity. If this is truly Jen's debut CD, then it sure doesn't sound like it – for it's an assured piece of work, and a subtle winner.

www.jenhajj.com

David Kidman