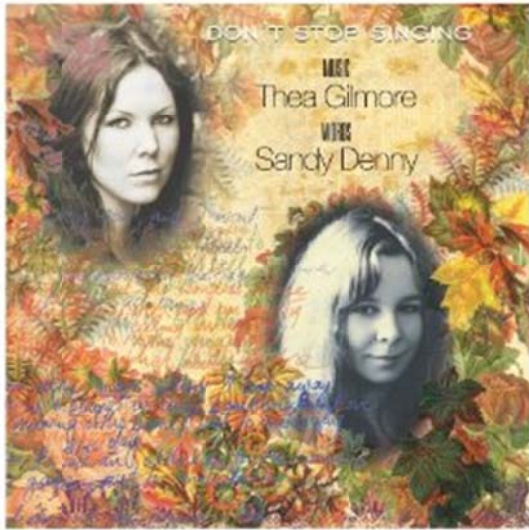


Thea Gilmore & Sandy Denny – DON'T STOP SINGING (Mighty Village/Island)



No, not an exercise in reincarnation, but a posthumous collaboration! There will be plenty who, like me initially, were wondering how this might have arisen; then I remembered that Thea's early internship at the latter-day Fairport's Woodworm Studios would have rendered her familiar with much of Sandy's music and recordings, and reading some of my own reviews of Thea's earlier albums Sandy's name had been invoked on occasion, so the idea was not such a strange one after all. And I recall Thea mentioning in an interview that songs by Sandy had become embedded in Thea's psyche from exposure to her father's record collection. Then, when I played the opening track of this CD, Glistening Day, I felt I could almost have been listening to a newly-unearthed outtake

from Sandy's Old Fashioned Waltz album... Anyway, first to the background to this project: its gestation lies in the discovery, 12 years ago, of a collection of 20 unscored (and undated) lyric manuscripts amongst Sandy's personal effects, which subsequently passed to her widower Trevor Lucas, upon whose death in 1989 they passed to Trevor's third wife Elizabeth, who in 2007 decided in conjunction with Island Records that the time was right for them to reach a public audience. The initial plan was to invite a number of female singer-songwriters to contribute, but it was on the strength of a song that Thea had chosen for her own contribution that she was asked to take on the whole project – a natural choice, given her proven empathy with Sandy's work and her own at times uncanny vocal resemblance. Out of the 20 lyrics in the collection, Thea here presents just ten, for reasons as yet unclear (or is this just conveniently paving the way for a second volume, cynics might say?). They explore familiar themes like the alienation, angst and heartbreak of the touring artist, personal battles against demons of self-confidence, conflict in romance and relationships, and awe of the natural world, and aside from a small number of minor changes here and there – and the addition of an extra, freshly composed verse to two of the lyrics, Georgia and Goodnight) – Sandy's original lyric drafts remain untouched in their setting by Thea. Perhaps Long Time Gone is the most achingly resonant of all the lyrics, with its desperately poignant assertions "If I don't make it before I die, I just ain't gonna die" and "I can't afford to live in this place and I can't afford to leave", while other standouts include the bravely resigned and heart-rending Goodnight, the forlorn and wistful lament of Song #4, the soon-to-be-forsaken maiden's entreaty Sailor (which, tellingly, Thea changes to Soldier for its final verse) and the lonely-separation-themed London (on which John Kirkpatrick's accordion plays a prominent supporting role), and the almost unbearably tender lullaby to Sandy's daughter Georgia that closes the disc. Other musicians helping Thea to flesh out the lyrics include husband and producer Nigel Stonier, with Kellie While and Benji Kirkpatrick making important contributions along the way. But we can never underestimate Thea's own contribution to the legacy of Sandy Denny here – and it's impossible to imagine anyone else making a more apt, respectful and loving tribute.

www.theagilmore.net and www.sandydenny.co.uk

David Kidman