

music

Thanks for the Melodies

Dyke favorites return to the recording studio

by Kathy Belge



**Greatest Hits:
The Road Less Traveled**

Melissa Etheridge • Island

After Melissa Etheridge's yearlong battle with cancer, we're happy to see anything from her now. A greatest hits album seems appropriate at this point in her career.

These 17 tracks spanning 17 years include many of Etheridge's timeless, tortured love songs. Classics like "Similar Features" and "Bring Me Some Water" are included alongside her later mainstream hits "Come to My Window" and Grammy winner "Ain't It Heavy." The one song that's noticeably missing is 2004's "I Want to Be in Love."

If you're afraid this album is simply a recap of every Melissa CD you already own, she's included a few previously unreleased tracks. I love it when lesbians cover love songs written by straight men. Etheridge's gritty remake of Tom Petty's "Refugee" is a treat.

Etheridge's bald-headed appearance at the Grammy Awards last year was one of the best rock performances I've seen in years—period. The live recording of Janis Joplin's "Piece of My Heart" is worth the price of the album alone. Also included is "Christmas in America," a poignant composition sung

from the viewpoint of a soldier's loved one.

Etheridge has always written about her life experiences, so naturally she includes two songs about cancer. She was commissioned by Ford to write "I Run for Life" for Race for the Cure. While her earnestness is to be admired and the tune is catchy, the song is about as deep as a Ford truck commercial. The ballad "This Is Not Goodbye" shows us that Etheridge's voice is as pure as ever and that personal pain brings out her best songwriting.

Have you Heard

Toshi Reagon • Righteous Babe

Folk blues goddess Toshi Reagon's sixth album, her first on Ani DiFranco's Righteous Babe label, might be the one that finally propels this talented musician/producer/songwriter into the mainstream spotlight.

To really experience Reagon, you must see her

live. In concert she builds each song to a crescendo of guitar, bass and vocals that takes you over until you have no choice but to tap your feet and groove along. This album comes close, but it can't match the energy of a live Toshi Reagon show.

On the opening song, "Have You Heard," Reagon's sweet voice calls for peace over a driving acoustic guitar and Catherine Russell's backup vocals.

Reagon, daughter of Sweet Honey in the Rock matriarch Bernice Johnson Reagon, has been influenced by diverse artists and genres. The opening electric guitar and bass line of "Building Blues" sound like early Pink Floyd, and "Down to the River" shows her gospel influence. Reagon even covers Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel."

Listen to Reagon's album, but if you really want to experience this cute butch musical prodigy—and trust me, you do—don't miss the chance to see her live in concert.



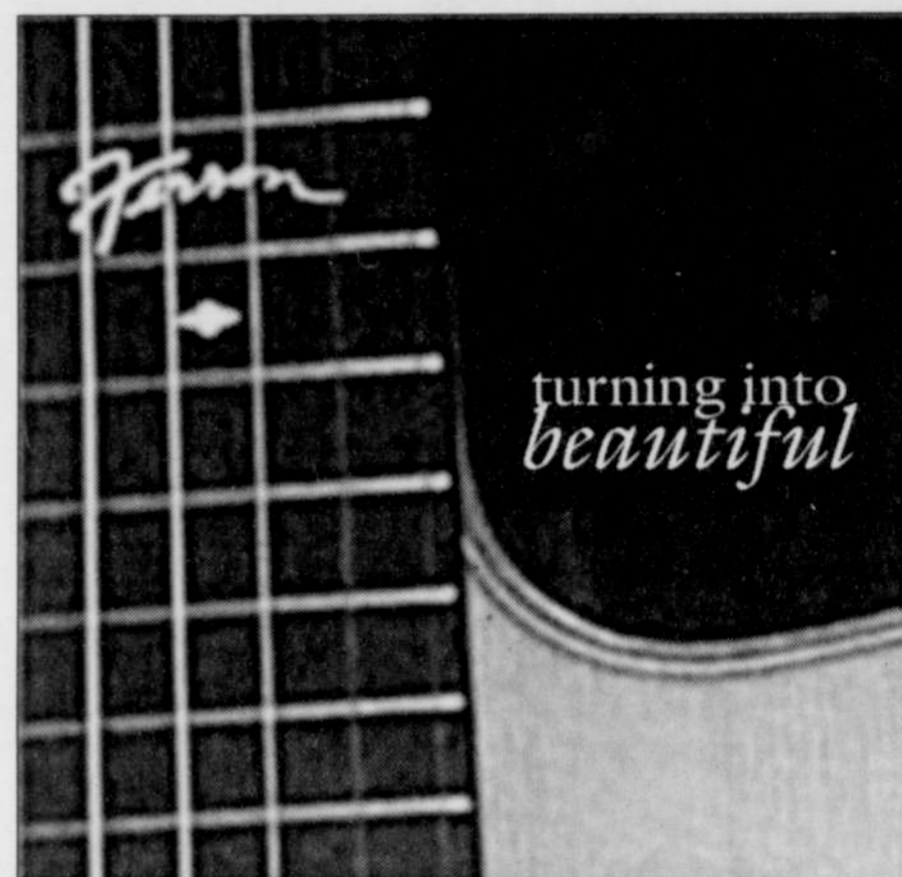
Turning into Beautiful

Ferron • Cherrywood Station

When they name the geniuses of our lifetime, Ferron should be included. *The Boston Globe* claimed, "Someday, they will call [Bob] Dylan the Ferron of the '60s." After more than 10 years away from the studio, Ferron returns with a strong CD that's true to her folk roots.

The album opens with "More Than That," with lyrics proclaiming, appropriately: "Hello my friends, I feel so happy to be back. To feel so clean and on the track."

Ferron's music has never been light, and *Turning into*



Beautiful is no exception. It's the kind of album to sit and listen to on your headphones with a glass of wine to really ponder the nuances of her lyrics.

Who else has the courage to write a 7 1/2-minute ballad, "Goat Path," a tribute to a deceased loved one? Ferron's lyrics paint emotional pictures with deep and multiple meanings: "I dreamed of you in a red car coat, you were smiling and so alive. You waved to me from that other dusty road and I knew you have arrived."

"Souvenir" is reminiscent of *Shadows on a Dime*, Ferron's 1984 classic. Shelley Jennings' slow electric guitar and Ferron's relaxed tempo speak to appreciating what you have and letting go of the things you have no power to change.

Ferron is forever searching for life's answers. She sometimes takes herself too seriously, like on "In the Mean Time": "I have wept upon the mountain, I have walked upon my knees. I have crawled along the rubble of broken promises and unmet needs."

If there's one criticism of Ferron, it's that her music is never as interesting as her lyrics. Her sound can be cyclical and redundant. But don't let that stop you from savoring one of the best lyricists of our time. **10**

Portland free-lance writer KATHY BELGE disses out queer advice and humor from a butch perspective for *Curve* magazine. Visit her online at www.lipstickdipstick.com.

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