



Mary Chapin Carpenter **Time \* Sex \* Love** Sony/Columbia Records

Unlike many reviewers, I found the contents of this disc disappointing. That's not to say that this isn't a good, well-made album. In truth, it beats most *country music* releases into a cocked hat. It's just that, in my eyes, it's not a great album. Chapin is well capable of doing better. Much, much better. History proves irrevocably that Chapin's writing has been peppered, from the outset, with classic thought provoking songs. Songs, that relate spellbinding stories. "This Shirt," "Halley Came To Jackson," "Stones In the Road," and "John Doe No. 24" – the list is legion. Track # 9 on this collection – "Someone Else's Prayer," was the first occasion I found myself thinking, "*now that's a keeper.*" Tellingly, the track features Chapin's voice and John Jennings guitar/bass. "The Dreaming Road" and the closer, "Late For Your Life," possesses the same mark of distinction. What's more, they are solely Carpenter-composed efforts. Five of the tracks here are collaborative efforts. The set title "**Time \* Sex \* Love \***" is definitely a case of *what you see is what you get*. And even though she occasionally injects a story line into some of these love songs, a surfeit of love songs can be, and is, just plain boring. Instead of running with vitality, this album limps due to the lack of variation. For example - although "Me Leaving You" rocks, with rhythm and verbal attitude, it is, subjectively, the antithesis of "He Thinks He'll Keep Him." In other words, the "*been there already*" syndrome. As for the "Simple Life," the telling line, [of self-doubt], in this drum beat driven cut, must be "*You're afraid you might have peaked.*" Hell, I said the same thing last year about Greg Brown's "**Covenant**" – in terms of way too many love songs - and darn if it didn't go and win the AFIM Best Contemporary Folk Album a couple of months back. So what do I know.....or, more pertinently, what did those AFIM judges think they knew ? Both discs, incidentally, featured *hidden* closing tracks. One of life's great pointless exercises!!!! Back in 1996, Chapin's "**A Place In The World**" left me with similar thoughts. You may have [already] noted in the list above, that I didn't include any *classic* songs from that disc. In the time between, we got the, much delayed, *greatest hits* compilation "**Party Doll [And Other Favourites].**" And that was all fine and dandy, but that's also where the subterfuge occurred. "**Party Doll...**" was *the firewall*, the reissue album, the break in the routine. Five years on, we get something new and the fans are ready and waiting with \$ in hand. Except, it isn't new. At her best, in terms of her skill with word and melody, I class Carpenter as the equal of, say – Bruce Springsteen. And the Boss ain't no fool, because with the arrival of "**Nebraska**" he knowingly grabbed the mould and smashed it to tiny pieces. He dumped the band, went back to basics, and found another way. The result was one of history's greatest musical recordings. In a single-stroke he reinvented himself. History has a habit of repeating itself, so what would be so wrong if Chapin chose *this road [so far] not taken?* Other have done it, why shouldn't she? The concept isn't rocket science. My conviction is that the results would be stunning. Available in UK record stores now.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

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