



Shawn Colvin **Whole New You** Sony/Columbia Records

Apart from children's album of covers, "**Holiday Songs And Lullabies**" which Shawn cut three years ago while heavily pregnant with her daughter, Caledonia Jean-Marie, this album marks Shawn's return as a *serious contender* in the singer/songwriter stakes, following a half-decade career hiatus. The 1996 collection "**A Few Small Repairs**" brought Shawn two more Grammys and, finally, significant chart recognition for the opening cut of that set, "Sunny Come Home." Not bad going for a twenty-year apprenticeship in music. Lyrically, the material on the latter disc was dark and slanted toward her, then recent, divorce, while "**Whole New You**" is aptly-tilted, since it finds Shawn generally celebrating life. The past five years having brought her a new husband and motherhood, and I guess, the *whole new you*. In magazine features, promoting this creation, it's somewhat ironic that Shawn has stated that *the conception and birth* of her latest disc was fraught with difficulties. Produced by long time musically collaborator John Leventhal, she says they both experienced trauma in the studio, yet you'd be hard pressed to discern that from the contents. For instance, the title cut is a hook laden, sixties pop inspired, joy. The line "*Shake your head in wonder when it's all too good to be true*" perfectly encapsulates Colvin's state of mind, circa 2001. In "Nothing Like You" she reflects on her own childhood, and *the new found wonder* that is growing up before her eyes every day. There's also a sneaky tribute to Austin hero, and double Tour De France winner, Lance Armstrong, in the line "*I have seen the top of Mt. Ventoux.*" Though non-specific lyrically – to husband or child, "Bound To You" also explores the family situation. With *one shoe* firmly planted in the folk arena, and the other in the field of pop, Colvin's lyrics have consistently explored relationships – often the bleak, dark side of those affairs. The darker songs here relate, for instance, to the human need to be a voyeur. The narrator in "Another Plane Down," a tv news junkie, is intent in knowing every minor detail as the truth behind a plane crash "*in the Atlantic nine miles off shore*" unfolds on the cathode tube. The erotic images and the four-letter word that closes the second verse may bring blushes to cheeks of your straight-laced maiden aunt. Teamed with the third, as well as the closing verse, they actually take the song, subjectively, into the realm of dreams and how dreams play tricks on the human mind. "Roger Wilco," a military term used five decades ago by fighter and bomber aircrew, deals with the act of desertion in the face of impossible odds. In a wider context, apart from comrades in arms, the situation relating to dereliction of duty could equally be applied to events in family life. It's worth noting that while she enjoyed her five-year recording break, one aspect of "**Whole New You**" marks a departure for Colvin; all of the songs were co-written with Leventhal, while that *long silent* chanteuse, Edie Brickell, [also] added her name to "Roger Wilco." Whatever, this is a sterling set of folk/pop songs, irrespective of the tales Colvin has circulated regarding the circumstances surrounding its birth. Available in UK record stores now.

Folkwax Rating 5 out of 10

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