



Carol Noonan **"Big Iron"** Noonan Music

The dirge like [and mostly original] material and dour delivery on Carol Noonan's mid nineteen-nineties releases **"Absolution"** [1995] and **"Noonan Building & Wrecking"** [1996] left me cold. Well, that's my recollection. Her final album for Rounder Records was titled **"The Only Witness"** [1997]. In 1999 Signature Sounds issued a retrospective by her early career band, Knots & Crosses, titled **"There Was A Time"** which drew material from the trio's 1991 and 1993 releases, and included two new specially recorded cuts. It may have been the sunset of the twentieth century, but the trio's work – of which Noonan was a member – [once more] left me cold. Noonan has now adopted the self-release route for her recordings and **"Big Iron"** is her second effort, featuring covers with a mostly cowboy/western flavour. Anyone with a modicum of knowledge of the recordings of Marty Robbins, will recognise the album title as his March 1960 No.5 Country Single Chart hit. Noonan's album opens with the traditional "Red River Valley" and that's where this album kind of grabbed me by the throat – because this girl possesses a crystal clear singing voice. The well known "Streets Of Laredo," "Wayward Wind," "High Noon" [from the 1952 movie of the same name] and the aforementioned title cut follow in quick succession. Later in the set Noonan introduces, "Cross To Bear," the first of three self-penned numbers wherein the narrator steals his father's new bride, though only after surviving a gunfight with his father. A fugitive from justice, in the ensuing years he raises a new family with his *captive bride*, while the five brothers he left behind pursue a life of living [and dying] by the gun. "Mae Oh Mae" is another Noonan composed gunfighter ballad – a genre she seems to savour. One of her older songs "Unknown Thing," is a late addition to the disc. Carol included it as a way of bringing comfort to those affected by the events of September 11th 2001. Lyrically, an undefined disaster has occurred and the closing line of the opening pair of verses employ the word "won't", while the closing verse emphatically employs the word "will" – in the uplifting, optimistic line - *"And we will be right again."* "Unknown Thing" first appeared on Carol's album **"The Only Witness."** Conceptually and in execution, **"Big Iron"** is comparable with those rather fine *western* albums that the estimable Mary McCaslin recorded for Rounder/Philo decades ago.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

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