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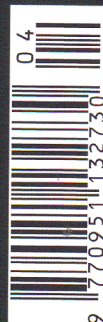
Local Music From Out There

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ANAIIS MITCHELL

The Brightness Righteous Babe Records
PRO 20531

Following two self-released recordings, Mitchell – a 2003 Kerrville New Folk Festival songwriting contest winner – has signed with Righteous Babe Records, Ani DiFranco's rollin' 'n' ramblin' musical circus. *The Brightness* is a collection of 11 originals by this 26 year old from Vermont, whose singing voice can best be described as that of a woman child. Of her second outing, *Hymn For The Exiled*, I wrote "Mitchell is an accomplished, sharp (as in barbed) and clever lyricist, while in terms of penning melodies and guitar playing expertise she still has significant ground to cover". The latter comment could apply to some 'melodies' on this new collection: *Of A Friday Night*, *Changer* and *Santa Fe Dream* being prime examples.

Hymn For The Exiled was partly a travelogue, featuring lyrics that painted homeland landscapes as well as Middle Eastern settings, and that formula is repeated on *The Brightness*. *Your Fonder Heart* opens with an invitation "Come out, come on, come outside, Don't you hide your handsome face from me," but it's in the chorus that this album opener catches fire with wave after wave of soaring multi-voiced harmonies. *Of A Friday Night* sports a piano accompaniment, while Mitchell's lyric assesses how the 'art' of a truly creative individual is undervalued in this era of shallow, talent challenged celebrity.

Song Of The Magi is the first Mitchell composition with which, hand on heart, I can say that I made any emotional connection. At the outset we are introduced to three wise men bearing gifts, but in later verses it's present day Bethlehem – "the killing floor" – that is Anais's focus. That's evidenced by "Your home is a checkpoint now" and "Life ain't fair my child, put your hands in the air my child, Slowly now single file, now up against the wall". Having observed Bethlehem's checkpoints and its armed soldiers (with my own eyes), I can grasp the contradictory, two millennia apart, spectre of 'calm and conflict' that Mitchell's lyric invokes.

Mitchell has credited the late Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* of novels as being a powerful influence on these new song lyrics. Durrell's novels, published during the period 1957-1960, were, at the time, judged experimental. 50 years on, Anais Mitchell's marriage of sounds and carefully chosen words, appears equally experimental.

www.righteousbabe.com

Arthur Wood