



Lori McKenna **"Pieces Of Me"** Catalyst Disc

Like Catalyst label mate Kris Delmhorst, I first stumbled across Lori McKenna on the Signature Sounds charity compilation **"Respond"** back in 1998. In my Kerrville Kronikle review of the 2CD set I commented, *"Other standouts include Jess Klein's folksy love ballad "Romeo," "Fireflies" the fantasy woven by Lori McKenna and Linda Nawn's "Lately.""* "Fireflies" reappears on this, McKenna's sophomore solo effort. While the underlying theme of the opening cut "Mars" concerns ageing, the lyric also draws out Lori's maternal instincts when, with an image of *the red planet* reflected in his eyes, her son states the innocent ambition *"Mama, I'm going to get there someday"* to which she replies *"Fly."* In the real world, McKenna is a mother to four pre-teens. Dedicated to Lori's mother, Kris Delmhorst plays cello and Richard Shindell provides the backing vocal on "Never Die Young." *"I tell him life is just a dream"* a line from "Mars," reappears as *"life is a masquerade"* on this song, as Lori confirms a passing with *"But you are the one who is gone"* in the closing line of the penultimate verse. Giving expression to the hopelessness and emptiness that loss brings, the lines *"I'm not a winner, I'm just brilliantly bitter, I'm sealed by my skin, but broken inside,"* mercilessly tore at this listener's heartstrings. Relatively speaking this lady's career may still be on the *outbound* slope, but my opinion is that she has already created a number of masterpieces. The latter song being such a creation. A common thread that links many of McKenna's lyrics is that of, Catholicism. *"Catholic School"* and *"Sister Mary"* in the latter song, become the line *"Watch mass on Channel 56"* and more in *"God Will Thank You."* Lest you [dear reader] are concerned that McKenna has an agenda to convert in mind, she delivers the lines with a light touch. In the latter lyric, the contentions *"They never brought anything back from Roswell"* and *"The big bang theory don't hold much weight"* represent the *point of balance* in expressing her ethos. The aforementioned mystical and magical "Fireflies," complete with an Ellis Paul support vocal on this revision, remains an effervescent expression of joy and innocence. McKenna dedicates "Pink Sweater" to James Byrd, the 49-year-old black man who was dragged to his death in Texas, while attached by a chain to the back of a pickup truck. While it's obvious that McKenna's lyrics draw upon her personal experiences, the closing trio of tracks "Deserving Song," "Pieces Of Me" and "You Are Loved" appear subjectively stripped to the bone. There's no attempt to shroud them with layers of mystique. The "born with a silver spoon" lifestyle expressed in the opening lines of "Deserving Song" gives way to extreme statements of self-deprecating honesty that repeatedly conclude *"I don't deserve anything I get."* As for "Pieces Of Me" and "You Are Loved," respectively, take *"I am dripping wet with things to understand. And you are trying to believe"* and *"my smile can say all a heart need say"* as touchstones. Possibly a little introspective in places, but a superb collection of songs nevertheless.....the album title says it all.

[**Ed. Note.** Respond is a Boston based agency that assists women and children who are the victims of domestic abuse and violence].

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood
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