



Holly Near "**Early Warnings**" Appleseed Recordings

At the rear of the CD liner booklet, there's a short paragraph headed by the word, *Context*. I quote, "*Most of the songs included in this reissue were written in the 1980's. Reagan was president, Apartheid ruled in South Africa. The AIDS epidemic was cataclysmic. The US - backed Contras rained havoc on the Nicaraguan revolution. The women's movement was reeling from the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. Fear - based thinking and fundamentalism were on the rise. There were many early warnings.... And the storms just kept on coming.*"

Nine of the fourteen tracks on "**Early Warnings**" hail from Near's 1984 album "**Watch Out,**" while another four songs appeared five years later on "**Skydances.**" Making up the total of fourteen is the closing cut, a Pete Seeger composition, "Quiet Early Morning," which was included on the 2CD Seeger tribute collection "**Where Have All The Flowers Gone**" [1998]. Near's collaborators on this collection include fellow environmental and social activist John McCutcheon [3 songs], long time musical collaborator Jeff Langley [1 song], and Steve Wood [1 song]. Apart from the aforementioned Seeger tune, three other cover songs are included on this disc. They are "War Of The Flea" [Chris Kando Iijima/Joanne Nobuko Miyamoto], "Step It Out Nancy" [Robin M. Williams/Jerome Clark] and "Sky Dances" [Jimmie Durham/Roy Brown]. As for the overall feel of the collection, Near sounds at times not unlike Judy Collins, while *campaigning* surfaces as a consistent feature of her lyrics. The collection includes songs about abuse ["Child"], the *footprints* we leave behind over the passage of time ["Sun Won't Stop" – actually written for her late father], the traditional sounding *empowerment of women* Near composition ["She"], and a woman who reneges against an arranged marriage ["Step It Out Nancy"]. In *easy listening* mode there's "Don't Let The Singer Down," "Couple Of Friends" with a lyric supportive of the feminist movement, while "West Virginia Friend" is a paean to the cherished companions we make in this life.

Folkwax Rating 6 out of 10

Arthur Wood
Kerrville Kronikles 09/02