



Eilen Jewell "**Boundary County**" no label

Jewell was born and raised in Idaho and discovered music at the age of seven, spent her college years in New Mexico, moved to California and busked around Venice Beach then switched coasts and settled near North Barrington, Massachusetts. Currently in her mid-twenties and now based out of Boston, "**Boundary County**" was self-released by Jewell during the Spring of 2006. On the strength of that album, Eilen was signed by the Central Massachusetts based imprint, Signature Sounds Recordings, and her next recording will appear on that label early in 2007.

The album opens with the slow paced, album title track wherein Jewell's 'mature in years' narrator reflects on her misspent past – lots and lots of alcohol, much wayward wandering – and now dreams of finding a final resting place in the wide-open plains of her youth. Eilen's plaintive style of delivery continues on the pretty much self-explanatory, second cut, "Till You Lay Down Your Heavy Load," while a sensual intimacy suffuses the lyric to "Hey Hey Hey." By the time I got to the fourth cut, "Fourth Degree," my figuring was that essentially what Jewell had concocted with "**Boundary County**" was a series of mood pieces, while the constancy of her [literally song-on-song] plaintive vocal delivery was already beginning to pall.

Farther along, "Back To Dallas" is an upbeat number into which James McMurtry would inject some serious rhythmic body, and while Jerry Miller's contribution on lap steel guitar displays some spirit, sadly Jewell's vocal doesn't. The much-repeated line "*Then your troubles will be like mine*" that closes "No Place To Go" is nothing less than an irritation – all forty-five seconds of it, in a cut fifteen seconds short of four minutes duration. You do the math! "The Flood" appears to be a cautionary song about New Orleans, in which Jewell suggests that it was political indifference and inaction [for instance, in providing adequate, strong levees] rather than a hurricane that [recently?] laid waste to the city. Since a politician or hurricane is not specifically named, or any specific date quoted, my question mark in the previous sentence is a reference to 20<sup>th</sup> century inundations of the Crescent City [and, for that matter, the state of Louisiana].

There's a case in terms of "**Boundary County**" as an entity, for suggesting that start-to-finish there's minimal attempt at melody [or at least, variation in same] and in that regard one track pretty much merges into the next. As for Jewell's lyrics they are neither intellectually stimulating nor poetically deep, and certainly come over as consistently depressing. Eilen Jewell, currently considered a wunderkind in her adopted Boston, mostly definitely wears her blues influences – Bessie Mae Hemphill etc. etc. - on her sleeve in "**Boundary County**." That said her singing voice and material [currently] lacks the distinction that makes you want to sit up and pay wrapt attention.

Folkwax Score 6 out of 10

**Arthur Wood.**

Kerrville Kronikles 01/07.