



Laura Nyro **“Live At The Fillmore East 1971”** Columbia/Legacy Records

By the time Laura Nyro appeared at the late Bill Graham’s Fillmore East, NYC, on Sunday May 30th 1971, on a bill shared with Spencer Davis and Peter Jameson, the native New Yorker had recorded a handful of studio albums, although the release of the fifth disc – a *collection of cover songs*, **“Gonna Take A Miracle,”** that featured the female vocal trio Labelle - was, in late May 1971, still some six months in the future. This sixty-five minute long live disc is subtitled **“Spread Your Wings And Fly,”** and those words are taken from the opening cut, “American Dove,” a Nyro original that has never previously graced one of her releases. The same can be said of the closing track, the appropriately titled, “Mother Earth.” A *white soul diva*, musically, Nyro’s stock in trade was composing and performing soulful anthems, and “American Dove” is a honest appeal for peace made at a time when America was still heavily engaged in fighting a war in East Asia. Three decades later, in the Middle East, the nation is embroiled in *Vietnam 2*. The stunning “Mother Earth” clocks in at almost eight minutes long [including the intro], and the lyric of this love ballad is filled with images drawn from the natural world along with a few heaven based ones – “*The first step to heaven is to pay your dues,*” and “*Do you believe in Mother Earth, She will heal you, The earth smells of her, And God is her lover, She will heal you with wisdom and love.*”

Harking back to **“Gonna Take A Miracle,”** and in particular the *extended version* that Columbia/Legacy issued a couple of years ago, the latter release featured a quartet of live cuts abstracted from this performance. Those cuts were Ashford and Simpson’s “Ain’t Nothing Like The Real Thing” and “[You Make Me Feel Like] A Natural Woman” from those Brill Building wizards Goffin and King plus producer/writer/executive Jerry Wexler. On **“Live At The Fillmore East 1971”** the latter pairing constitutes one of four medleys. “O-o-Child” and “Up On The Roof” re-surface here as a three part segue that opens with Nyro’s “Timer” [a song that first appeared on **“Eli And The Thirteenth Confession”**]. During her recording career Nyro never released a rendition of Bacharach & David’s “Walk On By,” and here it segues with “Dancing In The Street” – a studio version of which appeared on **“Gonna Take A Miracle.”** The fourth and final medley teams Nyro’s own “Lu” [from **“Eli And The Thirteenth Confession”**] with “Flim Flam Man” [from **“More Than A New Discovery”** aka **“The First Songs”**]. The foregoing nine songs includes 1960’s Pop Chart hits for Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell, Aretha Franklin, The Drifters, The Cryan’ Shames, Dionne Warwick, Isaac Hayes and Martha and The Vandellas. And there’s more....from the team of Jerry Leiber and Phil Spector [Leiber mainly wrote with Mike Stoller], Laura covers “Spanish Harlem,” a tune that gave Ben E. King [ex-The Drifters] a solo chart hit back in 1961. A studio rendition of the latter song was included on **“Gonna Take A Miracle.”** The Shames apart, the forgoing, black, soul and r&b artists and groups [mainly] recorded for the Tamla Motown and Atlantic labels. You may recall that, earlier, I referred to Laura Nyro as a *white soul diva*. A child of the sixties, and a unique performer/consummate composer, Laura never attained the commercial appeal of *similar* acts like Carole King and James Taylor.

Another five years would elapse before “I Am The Blues” appeared on Laura Nyro’s **“Smile,”** but here she gives the song a raw, yet heartfelt, reading. Renditions of “Emmie” [**“Eli And The Thirteenth Confession”**], “Map To The Treasure” and “Christmas In My Soul” [**“Christmas And The Beads Of Sweat”**] and finally “Save The Country” [**“New York Tendaberry”**], are all rapturously received by the audience. Accompanying herself on piano, with no *safety net* of support musicians, this recording hails for a time when Nyro was at the top of her game, and although her voice almost breaks on a number of occasions [it’s filled with genuine emotion on “Mother Earth”], end to end this collection is chock full of classic performances, be they Nyro originals or cover songs.

Her best known songs “Stoney End,” “Wedding Bell Blues,” “And When I Die” and “Stoned Soul Picnic” don’t feature here, but maybe Columbia/Legacy are holding out on us, and one day they’ll appear on the *extended version* of this awesome concert performance.

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

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