

93

Playlist
Joan Shelley's
commanding
indie folk

94

Playlist
Gambetta and
McManus—flash
and substance

95

Books
'Boutique Acoustics'
explored and
explained

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ALEXANDRA VALENTI



Shawn Colvin

Common Thread

**For the first time in 20 years,
Shawn Colvin returns to the all-covers format**

BY PAT MORAN

Shawn Colvin's *Uncovered* is her second album of reverent, yet surprising, renditions of other writers' material. What distinguishes this collection from 1994's *Cover Girl* is Colvin's stripped-down, acoustic-centered approach to these diverse tunes. As well as being a tribute to a number of fine songsmiths, *Uncovered* serves as a reminder that Colvin started out as an acoustic guitarist.

Most of the cuts build on the solid backbone of Colvin's strummed, plucked, and percussive Martins—a D-18 and her signature M3SC. Even the most artfully arranged productions boast the unvarnished vitality of first takes and tossed-off demos. On Tom Waits' "Hold On," Colvin's

percolating acoustic urges the melody along while her amber-hued alto caresses colorful heirloom phrases like, "I miss your little broken-china voice." The galloping "Private Universe," originally recorded by Crowded House, spirals off Colvin's insistent taps on her guitar top, which suggest the metronome of the human heart.

The ragged-but-right clutter of the Band's "Acadian Driftwood" is traded for minimal snare and winding mandola, turning an ambling narrative into a folkloric quest. Similarly, the bombast of Gerry Rafferty's "Baker Street" is tempered by Colvin's hymnal harmonies with David Crosby. Wisely, the original's over-driven saxophone is traded for the far-off locomotive

wail of pedal-steel, lending Rafferty's hard-luck fantasy unexpected grit and gravitas. With massed strummed acoustics, Colvin's lush, propulsive take on Graham Nash's "I Used to Be a King" runs counter to the pared-back approach on the rest of the album, recalling the layered production of 1970s Laurel Canyon pop.

Prized for her distinctive, confessional songwriting as well as her dusky, soaring vocals, Colvin has never been shy to honor her influences. On *Uncovered*, her folk-tinged grab bag of favorites crosses genres but shares a common thread. It's a pop collection that balances accessibility with integrity, tunefulness with emotional ballast.