

Joanna Newsom - Have One on Me (2010)

Written by bluelover

Friday, 30 April 2010 15:34 - Last Updated Monday, 20 February 2017 16:32

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CD1

1. "Easy" 6:04
2. "Have One on Me" 11:02
3. "'81" 3:51
4. "Good Intentions Paving Company" 7:02
5. "No Provenance" 6:25
6. "Baby Birch" 9:30

CD2

1. "On a Good Day" 1:48
2. "You and Me, Bess" 7:12
3. "In California" 8:41
4. "Jackrabbits" 4:23
5. "Go Long" 8:02
6. "Occident" 5:37

CD3

1. "Soft as Chalk" 6:29
2. "Esme" 7:56
3. "Autumn" 8:01
4. "Ribbon Bows" 6:10
5. "Kingfisher" 9:11
6. "Does Not Suffice" 6:44

- * Joanna Newsom - harp, piano, vocals
- * Alex Camphouse - horn
- * Dan Cantrell - piano, hammond organ, pump organ, harpischord, accordion
- * Patrick Cress - bass clarinet
- * Ryan Francesconi - Bulgarian tambura, kaval, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, electric bass, banjo, mandolin, soprano recorder
- * Sascha Groschang - cello
- * Djeina Haruta - viola
- * Shawn Jones - bassoon

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- * Shira Kammen - vielle, rebec
- * Dan Koretzky - timpani
- * Katie Kresek - violin
- * Judith Linsenberg - alto, tenor and bass recorder
- * Kane Mathis – kora
- * Greg Moore - backing vocals
- * Thom Moore - backing vocals
- * Neal Morgan - drum set, percussion, timpani, backing vocals
- * David Morris - viola da Gamba
- * Yeolim Nam - violin
- * Eric Oberthaler - trumpet, cornet
- * Philip Payton - violin
- * Laura Reynolds - oboe
- * Andrew Roitstein - double bass
- * Phaedon Sinis - flute, tarhu, kemence
- * Lily Storm - backing vocals
- * Andrew Strain - trombone

It was a little disturbing at first to hear that Joanna Newsom's full-length follow-up to the ambitious and polarizing *Ys* would be a triple album. Where 2004's *The Milk-Eyed Mender* was an unusual record with its share of quirks (her squeaky voice and fondness for arcane language, the harp), it also had its simple pleasures. Most of the tracks were short and the sound was spare; you pretty much liked it or you didn't based on how you felt about Newsom's sound and her ability to put a song together. *Ys*, on the other hand, was unapologetically dense. The five songs averaged more than 10 minutes each, and through them Newsom sang continuously; Van Dyke Parks' arrangements were similarly relentless, seeming to comment upon and embellish almost every line. It was a rewarding album-- filled with memorable turns of phrase and impressive storytelling. Many were enthralled, and almost everyone at least admired it. But in comparison to *Milk-Eyed*, *Ys* took some serious work to crack. So when I heard that Newsom would be following it with a 3xLP set called *Have One on Me*, I had troubling visions of 25-minute songs with lyrics that stretched to 5,000 words.

As it turns out, *Have One on Me* is a "triple album" in the vinyl sense, in the same way that the Flaming Lips' *Embryonic* is a "double album," even though it fits onto one CD. There are 18 songs here, and they total about two hours. To pick a couple of reference points from the CD era, that's the same length as Smashing Pumpkins' *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, and just a bit longer than Biggie's *Life After Death*. Two hours is a lot of music, but having it broken into three discs, each the length of a 1970s LP, helps. You can dip into *Have One on Me* at a given point, listen for a while, and move on to something else. But while the album invites

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sampling, I've found myself returning to a different section each time I sit down with it. The highlights are spread out evenly, and Newsom couldn't have sequenced the record any better.

While songs here evoke moments of *Ys* and *Milk-Eyed* and Newsom's harp is still the dominant musical focus, it's striking how much *Have One on Me* feels like its own thing. Not a progression, exactly, more of a deepening. You can feel roots going down and an edifice being built. Her voice has gained depth and she sings with more force and clarity, so that's part of it. And the arrangements are more judicious and draw less attention to themselves (some tracks are just harp, others add horns, strings, and percussion, but with a lighter touch). But the bigger difference seems to be the overall mood, which is expansive and welcoming. The best songs feel more like conversations rather than artworks to be hung on the wall and admired from several paces away. Newsom seems to sing from somewhere deep inside of them, and her earthy presence has a way of drawing you in, bringing you closer to her music than you've been before.

The name you'll most hear in discussion of this record is Joni Mitchell. Part of it is that Newsom can sound a fair bit like her with her more richly textured voice. Sometimes, almost eerily so, like on "In California" (the way she wraps the vocal melody around the evocative title word is just a few miles up the PCH from Blue's "California"). In addition to her voice and phrasing, the more approachable songs here, from the stirring harp-and-voice ballads "Jackrabbits" and "Esme" to the funny, weird, and hugely appealing road song "Good Intentions Paving Company", have bluesy chord progressions that stand in stark contrast to the rigid folk modes of *Ys*. These songs sway and heave with a warmth and approachability that are new for Newsom. They, and several others like them, offer a fresh way into Newsom's music for the curious.

"The phantom of love moves among us at will," goes a line in "Esme". Most of the songs here deal with love in some form, another quality that connects *Have One on Me* to the broader singer-songwriter tradition. Sometimes the love is romantic; other times it's about friendship or family. Newsom sometimes approaches the subject from her elliptical perch, talking in pictures-- "Each phantom-limb lost has got an angel (so confused, like the wagging bobbed-tail of a bulldog)," is the line that follows the one above in "Esme". But though Newsom indulges her gift for imagery early and often, *Have One on Me* has moments of simplicity and directness, where the tangled phrases can be boiled down to, "Life can be difficult and lonely and we all need love, but holding on to it can be hard."

One significant difference between Newsom and Mitchell is that the latter, especially early in her career, was writing songs that would sound good on the radio. For better or worse, Newsom is

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not a pop singer-- that's just not what she does. So I don't want to overstate this record's accessibility. A few tracks here, especially longer ones like the title track and "Kingfisher", approach the winding density that marked *Ys*. On these, song structure is elusive-- at any given moment you're not sure if you're listening to a verse, chorus, or bridge. The lyric sheet helps a bit, but with two hours of music to digest, you won't feel too guilty about using the skip button here and there, or digesting the record in pieces. Helpfully, returning to the most immediate songs causes their charm and appeal to bleed into the tracks that surround them-- so the album seems to grow and change as you listen.

Have One on Me begins with "Easy", about a wish for the kind of life the title suggests, and closes with "Does Not Suffice", which finds the narrator packing up a house to leave after a breakup, putting away all that reminds her lover of how "easy [she] was not." The latter is subtitled "In California, Refrain", it uses a similar gospel-inflected progression as the earlier song, and it's flat-out gorgeous, heavy with sadness ("the tap of hangers swaying in the closet") but also exhibiting quiet dignity and strength. It's my favorite song here, and it comes last, which is a dependable sign that I'll be returning to an album often. When I hear Newsom sing the word "easy" in "Suffice" and my mind jumps back to the opener, it reinforces just how many threads she's weaved between those songs and how incredible it is to discover new things with every listen. ---Mark Richardson, pitchfork.com

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