

Amanda Rheume - The Skin I'm In (2019)

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1 *Picture Of You* 2 *Light Is Gone* 3 *This One's For You* 4 *The Skin I'm In* 5 *Friendly Fire*
6 *Tell Me Anything* 7 *Firefly* 8 *Return To The Water* 9 *Companion* Acoustic Guitar,
Electric Guitar, Mandoguitar – Colin Cripps (tracks: 1,2,8) Backing Vocals – Anders Drerup
(tracks: 8), Jadea Kelly (tracks: 2,5) Bass – Anna Ruddick (tracks: 7), Devon Richardson
(tracks: 1,2,3,5,6,8,9) Drums, Percussion – Derek Downham Electric Guitar, Acoustic Guitar –
Mike Tuyp Keyboards, Synth – Johnny Spence Lead Vocals, Acoustic Guitar – Amanda
Rheume Pedal Steel Guitar, Dobro – Burke Carroll (tracks: 4,7)

It's not until the very last track on Amanda Rheume's new LP, *The Skin I'm In*, that the promising songsmith truly lives up to the potential hinted at throughout the eight preceding cuts. But boy, is "Companion" ever worth the wait. The closing song on the Ottawa born Canadian Folk Music Award winner's new album (she snagged that trophy in 2014 for Aboriginal Songwriter of the Year) is boldly sparse, featuring only her sweet-yet-gritty voice and knotty, reverb-drenched electric guitar.

That raw and haunting final track is made all the more stark by the slickly arranged songs preceding it. Handling that production is Colin Cripps, of Blue Rodeo and Crash Vegas fame. Some of his embellishments are deliciously inspired, like the church organ bellows on the climatic chorus of "Picture of You." The assuredly stomping production and sprinkling of chimes he applies on "Light Is Gone," meanwhile, match the Celtic tinge that Rheume subtly but effectively adopts in her voice.

Sadly, Cripps' penchant for pleasant polishing renders some of these songs with nary a compelling edge, all the better to snugly fit on an AM radio station in the late '90s. The worst culprit: "This One's for You," a bland soft rocker worsened still by a title and lyrical hook better suited for a beer or coffee ad than an alt-folk song.

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Such occasional lyrical stumbles wouldn't be so noticeable if Rheume didn't show undeniable deftness for the craft elsewhere. Take, for instance, the fantastic lines about her ethnicity, complexion and being deemed dishonest on "Friendly Fire," ("Could I be half of somethin?... I can hear you questioning my lips, like some kind of purist"). Then there's the imagery on "Picture of You" ("Salt on the road burning up my boots"), which will make you all but bolt upright to hit the replay button. And if you listen carefully, the title track reveals multitudes that marginalized folks need to hear during these trying times.

These high points make The Skin I'm In a winner, despite some cloying, and outdated, compromises for mainstream airwaves. The chemistry between Rheume and Cripps crackles at the best of times. So if they confidently stick to raw boundary pushers like "Companion," in this era of Adele and Kacey Musgraves stardom, then Rheume and Cripps won't need a safe concession like "This One's For You," to top the charts. ---Kyle Mullin, exclaim.ca

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