

MICHAEL DOHERTY'S MUSIC LOG

SHARING MY LOVE OF MUSIC.

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Shawna Virago: "Heaven Sent Delinquent" (2016) CD Review



These are terrifying and depressing days, when an insane narcissist and his rabid band of racists are dismantling the country while swearing they are doing precisely the opposite. Among their many offenses is their removal of support for transgendered students. It drives me nuts when people fight against something that does them no harm whatsoever. Just think of all the money that religious groups sank into Proposition 8 here in California back in 2008, trying to keep gay people from

getting married. What difference would it make it to them if other people celebrated their love and dedication to each other with a ceremony? And now there is this crazy controversy over which bathrooms transgender students use. Can you imagine how difficult it is for these kids as it is? Bloody hell, let's show people a little kindness, a little understanding.

Well, in these troubled times, it's more important than ever to support our artists (particularly when the government wants to pull funding for the National Endowment for the Arts). Singers and songwriters are

the folks I'm turning to more and more for some relief from the horror coming from Washington, D.C. One CD that is really working for me is Shawna Virago's *Heaven Sent Delinquent*, her newest release. Shawna Virago is a transgender artist (something that in better times I might not even mention, but that now seems important to point out), and her music possesses a great honesty and a frankness and a sense of humor, all without losing sight of the poetry. I've long been a fan of folk music, and I especially appreciate folk music with a punk energy and attitude. Here Shawna Virago delivers. Here she thrives. Sometimes there is nothing more powerful than a singer with a guitar.

She opens the album with "Bright Green Ideas," which has a great, pumping energy, and there is delicious humor in lines like "*I said you're intoxicating/You look like a movie star/You said I must be intoxicated/But you liked the way I danced on the bar*" and especially "*Mama told me to beware/Of any boy who was polite/But when you said 'May I please/Sit on your face tonight'/I thought what did Mama ever get right?*" Those lines make me smile every time I listen to this disc. And this may be the only song to use the phrase "*your well-hung tongue.*" It's followed by "Gender Armageddon," the first song I heard from this album, the one that got me interested. It's a powerful song that, to my ears, contains both hope and heartbreak in its delivery. It also has some damn good lyrics. Check out these lines: "*You said you were so afraid to lie in your bed/You had too many cruel strangers sleeping in your head.*" And then in "The Ballad Of Miss Suzy Texas," the chorus really stands out: "*Take her break her, take her break her/Take her break her, break her heart in two/Take her break her, break her heart in two/You might think but she won't break like you.*" It's that last line that really makes it work.

"Last Night's Sugar" is slower, intimate, brutal song of seemingly futile longing. And it's one of my favorites. Check out these lines, which open the song: "*Some people have no surprises in them/You can set your clock by their routines/I'm watching my baby lose his paycheck/To rigged slot machines.*" She follows that by repeating, "*Give me a taste of last night's sugar,*" wanting to return to when things were better, before economic troubles divided them, ruined them. That's followed by the album's title track, "Heaven Sent Delinquent," a song that also mixes hope with a sad dose of reality. On the one hand, you want the song's protagonist to make good on her escape from a messed up town and non-supportive family. On the other hand, her method of escape leaves a bit to be desired. "*One of these days I'll get away/I told myself as they bowed and prayed/And I won't need a car or suitcase/Just some heels and my pretty face.*"

Another highlight is “Burnout,” a funny song about a first sexual encounter. This one too has some excellent lyrics, like “*And to just speak in lower case/But sometimes we’d lose our manners.*” I really like these lines: “*I thought what a loser but I liked his primate attitude/Around town he was a big noise/He said ‘I don’t normally kiss boys’/I said ‘That’s all right, sugar, I normally do’/So I took a chance/And taught him the steps to the mystery dance.*” Shawna plays harmonica on this track. She also plays harmonica on the CD’s closing number, “Land Of Guns And Honey,” another of the CD’s best tracks. Her vocal delivery and the harmonica certainly bring to mind some of Bob Dylan’s work. Check out these lines: “*I fell for a handsome salesman who specialized in escapism/He carried a big suitcase filled with stockings, booze and condoms/Driving through this land of guns and honey/I have learned talk is cheap and whiskey is money.*” Pretty good, eh? “*When it’s hot you pray for rain, and when it comes you don’t/This country can kill you, then again, what country won’t?*”

CD Track List

1. Bright Green Ideas
2. Gender Armageddon
3. The Ballad Of Miss Suzy Texas
4. Last Night’s Sugar
5. Heaven Sent Delinquent
6. Burnout
7. Anniversary Song
8. The Pleasure Car
9. Holy Rollers
10. Land Of Guns And Honey

Heaven Sent Delinquent was released on December 1, 2016 on Tranimal Records. (Yeah, the name Tranimal makes me laugh, in part because it reminds me of that goofy short-lived series *Manimal*. Remember that one?)

POSTED BY MICHAEL DOHERTY AT 6:57 PM