

Freelance Folkie

Review: The List of Whales by Carrie Ferguson

February 24, 2014 Amy J. Putnam

Popping in a brand new CD for the first time, even from a well regarded rising artist like Carrie Ferguson, always comes with a little bit of nervousness. Will I like this? I had heard her in the Emerging Artist Showcase at the 2013 Falcon Ridge Folk Festival but was not really familiar with her music. This was going to be essentially a new exposure.

Well, I needn't have worried. Right from the first measures, Ferguson's second album, *The List of Whales*, just reaches right in and commands the listener to move and be moved. The upbeat fiddle-infused opening track, "Sunlight," masks its story of a bittersweet journey of self discovery and seeking under a foot-tapping beat: "I've chosen things I thought were great that tore my soul apart/Sometimes it takes a few mistakes to know your own heart".

All of the songs on *The List of Whales* are written by Ferguson. There are several common themes running throughout – of love and loss, of self exploration and re-discovery, of remembering our deepest roots so we can forge forward again towards wherever we set our sights. The title track is not only about the world's loneliest whale, but also finding our own voice inside us, remembering the depths from which that voice can come, and remembering how we all are connected in/by/with nature: "The oceans keep their secrets/but memories flow through our blood." The album ends on a sweetly hopeful thought in the atmospheric "To The Moon": "Why tell yourself it will be hard/Why not tell yourself it will be easy."

Ferguson's voice is solid; she knows her range and uses it well. Most tracks are presented with a full band, with Ferguson most often on piano but also sometimes on guitar. She has an impressive slate of band members and backing musicians including Jim Henry (Tracy Grammer, Mary Chapin Carpenter), Ryan Hommel (Seth Glier), and Zoe Darrow (Zoe Darrow and the the Fiddleheads). The production is very tight, with clear mixes. I appreciate that I can hear her vocals well even in the most raucous tracks. A few tracks are more simply presented, including the elegant "Grandmother's Tree", and the a cappella, tongue-in-cheek "Food Song".

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The songs are sticking in my head which is always a good sign. Now I am eager to get her first release, *Riding On The Back of the Wind*, too. Listen to Carrie Ferguson, folks. you'll have a great time!