



Nashville-based, veteran singer/songwriter Claudia Nygaard's music invitingly straddles the fence between country and folk with a band sound that is decidedly unplugged and artfully laid-back in support of her sensually lyrical alto. And then, there's the matter of her songs-- that rival the likes of Guy Clark or Ian Tyson in their plainspoken, memoir-like quality, rich with personalized images and a resonant point-of-view. Efforts like the patriotic immigrant tribute "Big Country" (with boudhran accents by Rick Lonow and pennywhistle and accordion fills courtesy of Jeff Taylor), an eloquent vignette about a black laborer recalled from her childhood called "J.C." (with just bass, guitar and accordion accompaniment) and the autobiographical tale "His Left Side," about the aftermath of a stroke her father had suffered, all have an abiding, timeless stature to them.

Other pleasant surprises encompass gems like the frothy "Miss Kitty" (a riotous send-up of the old *Gunsmoke* television show with tuba by Bobby Durham, dobro by Fats Kaplan and backing vocals from the famed Long Branch Choir), a slowly drifting, soft jazz-tinged love song for a "Georgia Boy" (with vibrant Stromberg acoustic guitar courtesy of Andy Reiss and some plaintive Barbara Lamb fiddling), the metaphorical "Coyote," with Charlie McCoy on lonely harmonica, and the powerful, sound effects-enhanced title song, that feelingly delineates her personal, lived-in philosophy. Recommended. Gary Von Tersh, Sing Out Magazine.