

SARAH CARROLL

WAHINE

Croxtan

Pity this record doesn't come with printed lyrics, though I'm sure you'll be able to look them up on the internet any minute... it's the kind of intimate, story/character painting record that you would fall into so much more quickly reading the lyrics whilst listening to Carroll's resolute tones. That said, perhaps Carroll doesn't want you to know exactly what she's saying straight up, perhaps a little mystery and suggestion is part of the music's allure, pulling you closer for further revelation. Either way, you don't need much arm-twisting to revisit this beguiling slice of unpretentious country folk. And, not that I know Carroll well, but part of the charm of this record is that it is so authentically and purely her – producer and label-mate Marcel Borrack has done a wonderful job of allowing Carroll to be herself. It really feels like you're sitting down to an unreserved face-to-face conversation with the singer-songwriter. Carroll isn't trying to sound like a drawling American heroine, nor exaggerating her Aussie-ness for effect – this album feels entirely ingenuous and instinctual.

Carroll and Borrack pair up to supply the core of each of these ten songs, and are sensitively assisted by Andy Baylor, Leigh Ivin, Chris Tabone, Barry Stockley and a small but perfectly formed cast of guests including Chris Wilson, of course, and ex-band mate Suzannah Espie. Though seasoned by pinches of horns, autoharp, accordion, keys and harmonies, Carroll's voice provides the irrefutable focus as she pays tribute to musical inspirations (Chris Gaffney on 'Candid Or Posed' and Mick Cameron on 'Bent Tree'), misery ('Crying At Midnight', 'It Hurts Me') and other stuff that I'm not so sure about (now, where were those lyrics sheets?) but sounds like celebration – 'Shantaray' and 'Another Season'. But then, a complete surprise at the end, the disarming title track is an instrumental! Nice work.

Martin Jones