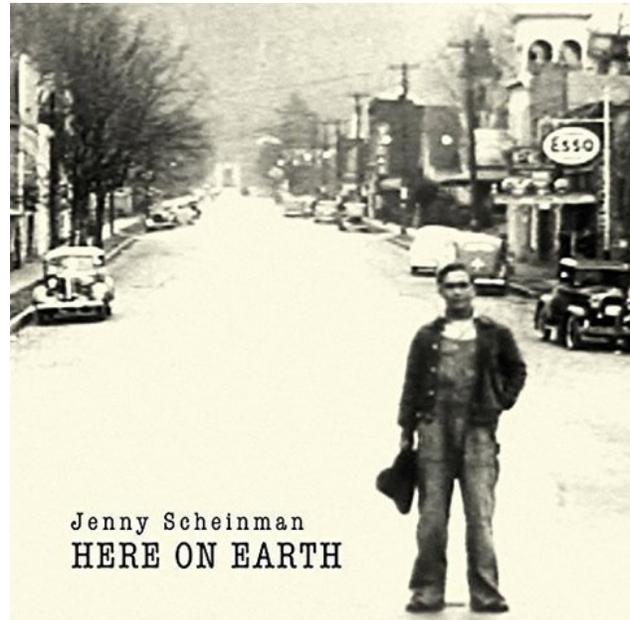




Jenny Scheinman: Here On Earth

By Dave Lynch | May 2017

Jenny Scheinman digs deeply into Americana roots on her spare, evocative 2017 album *Here on Earth*, casting aside the appealing vocals of her singer/songwriter persona for a set of 15 brief instrumental numbers featuring the violinist -- or make that fiddler -- supported mainly by longtime collaborator Bill Frisell (guitar) and Bad Livers' Danny Barnes (banjo, guitar, and tuba), with occasional appearances by Robbie Fulks (guitar and banjo) and Robbie Gjersoe (resonator guitar). The absence of drums and bass contributes to the album's intimate appeal, with the instrumental lineup sometimes suggesting a few friends gathered together for a fiddle, guitar, and banjo session on the front porch of a cabin in an Appalachian holler. Scheinman was commissioned to write many of these songs as soundtrack material for a project entitled *Kannapolis: A Moving Portrait*, in which director Finn Taylor and editor Rick LeCompte assembled and presented archival footage of Piedmont region dwellers originally filmed by North Carolina photographer and documentarian H. Lee Waters between 1936-1942, from the Great Depression to shortly thereafter. Joined by Fulks and Gjersoe, Scheinman performed in live accompaniment to Waters' images of ordinary people who made the best of hard times, and who no doubt found comfort in the simple, unadorned beauty of folk music not unlike the warm and heartfelt songs the violinist has penned here.



Scheinman evokes a bygone era through the grain of her rough-hewn double stops on the opening "A Kid Named Lily," the traditional stylings of her melody and chorus accompanied by expert fingerpicking from Fulks. The tune comes and goes in less than two minutes; it's one of *Here on Earth's* shorter tracks but not really an outlier on an album where brevity is key and no song quite reaches the five-minute mark. Anything more would seem indulgent and contrary to the album's sepia-toned sense of time and place. Scheinman and company have conjured up a classic sound throughout *Here on Earth*, but her idiomatic composing might be the album's most impressive feature, with the memorable tunes oftentimes eschewing contemporary touches (notable earworms include "Hive of Bees," with the fiddle's wide-interval leap in the melody's refrain; "Up on Shenanigan"'s jaunty display of Irish roots; and "The Road to Manila," its gentle sway imbued by a palpable melancholy). Yet a modern sensibility does creep in now and then, such as the discreet looping during "Broken Pipeline" (one of two numbers including Gjersoe's resonator guitar), a layered track with relentless urgency suggesting an escalating environmental calamity with no quick and easy solution. Conceived and executed prior to the 2016 U.S. election but released shortly thereafter, *Here on Earth* is the bicoastal Scheinman's paean to the roots music of a slice of flyover country. In today's fraught and divided America, one hopes that an album such as this could help bridge the divide and find commonality in listeners everywhere, through its songs that aim straight for the heart and hit their target every time.