

 **Dirty Linen**
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Shawn Colvin - avalanche of cinnamon

SHAWN COLVIN
These Four Walls

Nonesuch 79937 (2006)

Shawn Colvin sounds as fresh on this Nonesuch Records debut as she did back in 1989 on her Grammy-winning *Steady On*. In fact, the literalness of the bright and breezy opening cut "Fill Me Up" is magnified. Colvin is genuinely eager, obviously craving something from the act of singing and from her audience, and all the while giving back big time in a joyous pop-heavy performance. *Steady On's* title track had that pristine yet earthy low end supporting Colvin's crystalline voice. And if you weren't hooked already, one listen to "Shotgun Down the Avalanche," and you knew this would not be a flash in the pan. There was the sense that she was thoughtful and determined to make music carefully and lovingly, on her own very specific terms, while maintaining spontaneity and a free spirit. Seventeen years later, all of that, combined with true musical growth, is evident on *These Four Walls*.

Colvin's longtime producer and collaborator John Leventhal no doubt has a lot to do with this success story. Here he has co-written with her 10 of the 11 originals, and there is not a dud in the bunch. Yet ultimately it is Colvin's ability to create personas for her songs that explains her talent. She is endearingly belligerent for the country rock of "Tuff Kid"; tentative yet courageous for the lovely folk of "Summer Dress"; like a chanteuse for "Venetian Blue." And the choice of the perfect guest artist for the right song doesn't hurt, either. Marc Cohn and Patty Griffin's harmonies expand on the hint of *Rubber Soul*-era Beatles for "Cinnamon Road," and Teddy Thompson's beyond-his-age vocal maturity fleshes out "Let It Slide" as he and Colvin achieve a blend that is the high point of *These Four Walls*. The finishing touch is impeccably realized with a sparse arrangement of the Bee Gees' "Words." Colvin's sweet and simple delivery underscores the brilliance of the piece, which is often lost when some have interpreted it grandiosely.

Bravo to Shawn Colvin for this beautifully crafted project and for being in her music right where she needs to be.

— Ellen Geisel (Ballston Lake, NY)