



Washington, D.C.

## Recordings Quick Spins

September 17, 2006  
By Pamela Murray Winters

### THESE FOUR WALLS

#### **Shawn Colvin**

It's been five years since **Shawn Colvin's** last album, an eternity in a business whose primary market is likely to think that folky, singer-songwriter pop is an invention of artists half Colvin's age. But "These Four Walls" isn't fodder for the kiddies; it's the fruit of midlife reflection.

Colvin's voice is as lovely as ever, her lyrics crisply articulated against simple melodies suggested by collaborator-producer John Leventhal's riffs and arrangements. Demo-spare, guitar-based covers of the Bee Gees' "Words" and Paul Westerberg's "Even Here We Are" fit perfectly amid Colvin and Leventhal's lonely landscape.

"Cinnamon Road" offers a place "where we will go / to try and feel better"; Greg Leisz's yearning pedal steel and the blues-tinged harmonies of Colvin, Marc Cohn and Patty Griffin suggest it's somewhere south by southwest. "Summer Dress" offers a haunting, imagistic view of moving ahead, even when the "lights so bright" might be coming from the end of a tunnel. "The Bird" pretty much flips one, folk-rock style, to an old lover. "Let It Slide" and "These Four Walls" may or may not be about settling for what you've got, but the melancholy -- particularly in Teddy Thompson's harmonies on "Slide" -- suggests something less than a happy ending.

As with Colvin's earlier work, the songs are easy to love, with smooth surfaces to glide along if one merely wishes to skim the top. But the emotions fueling the lyrics are more complex and more mature than anything she's offered previously. The image of a middle-aged woman laid bare in "These Four Walls" isn't one for the industry. It's one for the ages.