

Rolling Stone

Album Reviews



Rickie Lee Jones

Pop Pop

RS: 4 of 5 Stars Average User Rating: Not Rated

1991

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Rickie Lee Jones last flirted with the jazz-standard repertoire on *Girl at Her Volcano*, from 1983. On that album, Jones took the theme of Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life" perhaps too seriously, wallowing in the warm, woozy nether world of "jazz and cocktails." Jones has worked her way through various transformations since then, from days of whiskey and roses to her current straight life with her family, and from her early-Eighties salad days to her mature and more modest industry profile in the last few years.

Now comes the wonderful and deceptively casual *Pop Pop*, another jazz-spiced entity altogether. On this album the ambience is afterglow, and the prevailing theme is love, as distinct from lust. Jones stretches out in spare settings, mostly with Robben Ford on nylon-string acoustic guitar and woodsy jazz great Charlie Haden on bass. The guest book includes Dino Saluzzi on bandoneon (the smaller tango accordion) and tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson, who solos evocatively on "Bye Bye Blackbird."

Compared with *Volcano*, *Pop Pop* is a more innocent and delicate exploration of the currents feeding pop music, from the Frank Sinatra hit parade ("The Second Time Around," "Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most") to the *Peter Pan* songbook ("I Won't Grow Up") to Jimi Hendrix (a swinging "Up From the Skies") to the pillowy surrealism of the Jefferson Airplane (a poignant reading of Marty Balin's "Coming Back to Me" to close out the set). Largely, *Pop Pop* harks back to the era when singers interpreted what writers wrote, predating the singer-songwriter phenomenon of the Sixties. The only in-house composition is producer David Was's typically Jonesy "Love Junkyard," a fish out of water on this set.

While allowing her Billie Holiday influence to surface, Jones lets her own original vocal style be her guide. With her odd mixture of brash show-tune flair, blue-noted affectations, folksiness and little-girl ingenuousness, Jones wraps herself around tunes like "My One and Only Love" or "I'll Be Seeing You" in ways no one else can. She glides over consonants and reshapes vowels to her liking. Dynamically, she is a creature of contrasts, now crouching into a whisper, now unleashing an exuberant holler.

Disarming in its warmth, stark in its directness, *Pop Pop* is an album that's soft to the touch and deep in the bone. As a portrait of the artist, it presents a view of a woman in retreat from her volcano, now enjoying the simpler pleasures of life and music. (RS 616)

JOSEF WOODARD

(Posted: Oct 31, 1991)