



Album Review

SUSAN JAMES

Highways, Ghosts, Hearts & Home

The big thing among indie artists these days is the EP and even the double-EP. Every time I see one of those double-EPs I think why not a whole album and then catch myself thinking who the hell am I? Not the artist, that's for sure. So, get this. Along comes [Susan James](#) and puts out a whole album and what am I thinking? *She should have put out two EPs!* Am I never satisfied? Guess not.

Well, wait a minute. Actually, I am. *Highways, Ghosts, Hearts & Home* satisfies me plenty, even if James does come from two separate places. There is a bit of the old country here, thanks as much to the musicians and the arrangements as anything. No, it's not country per se, but she ends up leaning that way on a few. Like on *Cold Moon On The Highway*, which has a *Theme from Zorro* aura, or *Airstream Girl*, with its short and strange instrumental lead-in and boot-scuffing rhythm, or *A Weed Is Not a Weed (When It Grows Where It Belongs)* with the slightly Celtic twist on a country theme. No, they aren't country, but they are slightly country flavored. Credit the superb guitar for a lot of it. It is dipped in quantities of reverb and tremolo, so much so that at times you would swear that Duane Eddy played the session. Not the Duane Eddy who wore his sound on his sleeve but the Duane Eddy who adapted to the sound of others when playing sessions. I never thought of Eddy as having country roots, but I guess a lot of rock 'n roll grew out of country and it fits. Kinda. In a way.

She also channels fifties and sixties pop, and again, through arrangements. *Out In the Woods*, for instance, is a beautiful shuffle until the chorus kicks in about two-thirds of the way through, when it becomes shades of exotica. Cue reverb on the siren-like background vocals and you fall just short of *Bali Hai* in essence if not reality. *Calling Mr. Zimmerman* carries on from there, the background vocals once again laying the mood with their sha-la-la's, perfect support for James' voice. It didn't take more than a few listens to make *Falling Waltz 2* a favorite. There is something about the way James wrote the slightly unorthodox verse, splicing them between an atypical Ann

Wilson (**Heart**) chorus. Toss in the organ and violin and it carries you away. Well, me anyway. Speaking of the shuffle, James shuffles us right back to the sixties with the light hearted *Goin' To California*, a song which is as much about mood as it is about anything. What can I say? It makes me feel good and, yes, I sway when I hear it. It's fun!

Says in the promo pack that James was once a hot item. I have no idea where I was then, but I can hear it. She writes like a consummate pro, has an engaging voice and uses it to virtual perfection. A few of these tracks could be hits and they aren't even my favorites. Pick up on this. And if you don't, remember the name. That's **Susan James**. She'll be back. I'm sure.

Frank O. Gutch Jr.

[website counter](#)

Supporting the Indies Since 1969