



Jenny Scheinman - *Here On Earth* (2017)

By S. Victor Aaron | April 23, 2017

Jenny Scheinman is not just any ace violin player; she might nominally be called a 'jazz' musician but she's displayed a mastery of music forms ranging from jazz, avant-garde and classical to folk and country. She's performed with artists as diverse but forward-looking as Sean Lennon, Paul Motian, Nels Cline and Bill Frisell. Oh yeah, she can *sing*, too! At the same time, a certain dialect that runs across nearly everything she does, one that's rooted in Americana.

The shorthand way of thinking of Scheinman is as the Frisell of the violin, with a musical vision and curiosity that reaches just as far and wide.

Her latest project explores the folk music of Depression Era Appalachia, music that many in recent times were introduced to from the George Clooney flick, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* or perhaps a Ken Burns documentary. Isolate this music instead of treating it as backing soundtrack, and the images you might otherwise see on the

screen or on a picture come alive in your mind. Leastwise, that's the impression left when it's rendered by Scheinman. And the connection to imagery is not by accident.

Scheinman composed most of the songs for *Here on Earth* (April 28, 2017, [Royal Potato Family](#)) for the Finn Taylor movie *Kannapolis: A Moving Portrait*, a collection of motion picture vignettes taken all over the Piedmont region during the Great Depression by H. Lee Waters. Waters captured the lives of poor but rugged people who lived in the forgotten, rural pockets across the Eastern U.S., images that resonated with Scheinman, who grew up in a smaller, isolated community as well.

In keeping with the heritage of Taylor's movie, Scheinman performed her new 'old' tunes the same way the subjects in the film would have: with a fiddle, guitar and banjo. Nearly all of these fifteen originals fall comfortably within the length of a 78 side and Scheinman, of course, handles the fiddle and leaves the guitar and banjo work invariably to Danny Barnes, Robbie Fulks...and Frisell. No bass, no percussion, no singing and no soloing makes the music as spacious as a North Carolina tobacco farm.

In place of lyrics, the instruments themselves do the 'singing' and you can almost make out words as, for example, Scheinman's fiddle plays the lyrical role on "A Kid Named Lily" or Frisell's guitar undertakes that task for "Pent Up Polly." "Delinquent Bill" finds Scheinman's fiddle and Frisell's guitar fitting together like hand-in-glove, full of harmony and down-home charm. Right after that, Scheinman finds communion with Barnes' banjo on the country jig "Up On Shenanigan."

Interspersed with peaceful numbers are faster tempo country barn dance tunes like "Shenanigan," "Deck Saw, Porch Saw," and "Don't Knock Out The Old Dog's Teeth." Robbie Gjersoe's resonator guitar adds a ghostly texture to "Broken Pipeline," as if Frisell's guitar didn't already lent that effect, and blends in with Fulks and Scheinman to add a touch of blues to "Deck Saw."

Using her own songs and bringing a great deal of musicianship to bear, Jenny Scheinman went much further than merely curating the culture of the American Piedmont Region in music. *Here on Earth* makes it possible to soak in that culture through harmony and rhythm as H. Lee Waters made possible through

