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"if you know what's good for you" ...
a regular look
by kevin madigan

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Mindy Smith is a singer whose sweet, sad voice had the normally verbose **Bob Edwards**, of NPR's Morning Edition, stuck for words while trying to describe her utterly bare singing style.

I first heard Smith in my car, on Edwards' radio program, when she sang a live version of One Moment More, a song about her deceased mother (herself a singer) and the title track of her debut album on Vanguard Records. I was so stunned that I had to pull over to listen and avoid crashing.

This is a woman who, as a child, was told by her idiotic teachers that she had no talent. As luck would have it, she persevered. Her restraint, her deft touch and the sparse arrangements make a profoundly moving statement.

"I'm very proud of it. It's me," she says of her mostly self-penned record, having rejected offers from major labels and suggestions from heavy-handed producers. "A lot of producers take over projects. That's not what I wanted," says Smith. The co-producer hat was placed on the capable head of **Steve Buckingham**, who has done wonders in the past for the **Chieftains** and **Dolly Parton**.

The resulting work is both melancholy and uplifting, a testament of will and spiritual salvation. And Smith is no wilting lily. "I need a hurricane to straighten out this place," she sings on Hurricane. "I'm doing what I can, putting out the fires," she asserts in Going Down in Flames. 'Hard To Know' mines **Suzanne Vega** territory, complete with distorted vocal and a serious hard rock tempo. As if that wasn't enough, Smith tackles Parton's classic 'Jolene' without batting an eye, with Parton

herself singing back-up. Now that takes confidence. Smith knows she's good, and now so do we. [Click here](#)

I saw **Rickie Lee Jones** play at Variety Playhouse on Super Bowl night, when, with a hint of sarcasm, she thanked any people for coming who would otherwise be at home glued to their television sets. I've always been of the opinion that American football is comical in the extreme: Grown men, padded to the nines, hurl themselves about for all of four seconds or so, then pile on top of each other in an ungainly heap. After they get disentangled, they stand about looking awkward. I can't even begin to take it seriously. Football - or soccer - on the other hand, is a real game, played by men and women who don't feel the need for battle gear in order to play with a ball. Soccer takes skill and courage, whereas American football seems to merely require brawn.

Jones, it would appear, feels the same way. "Guys running around in helmets crashing into each other don't mean *nothing* to me," she sneered, then added: "I hate fucking football."

Jones also tackled politics and the sorry state of the country, stressing the need to vote this year and fling Bush out of the White House as expeditiously as possible. Quite so.

The music that night was wonderful, with Jones leading a cracking band through a superb set of new material (from *The Evening Of My Best Day*, V2 Records) and older songs that remind us of what an impressive career she has accrued. Weasel and the White Boys Cool and Pirates (So Long Lonely Avenue) both sounded stronger and more fresh than when first released a couple of decades ago. 'Tell Somebody (Repeal the Patriot Act)' - from the new album - pulled no punches, and Lap Dog is a slow boogie with a subversive slide guitar.

Jones also seemed to be enjoying herself more than on some of the previous occasions that I've seen her perform. I vividly remember her excoriating an audience at the Roxy a few years ago to refrain from any clapping whatsoever. Then, at the end of the set, she abruptly announced that there would be no encores, and strode off the stage. But on the night of the Super Bowl, she was ebullient and amusingly cantankerous. www.rickieleejones.com

Until next time...