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Kimberly M'Carver's Hard Waltz: Purist Country Songwriting, Brilliant Voice

by delarue

Houston songwriter [Kimberly M'Carver](#) has a voice that will very gently knock you out. It's sort of a cross between Emmylou Harris and vintage Dolly Parton, with all the nuance of the former and the sweetness of the latter. M'Carver can sing clear and pure as a country spring, or turn up the vibrato at the end of a phrase for an especially heartbroken edge. True to its title, most of her latest album *Hard Waltz*, is oldschool, purist country music, with several numbers in 3/4 time. Being a strong songwriter, M'Carver had no problem pulling together an amazing band to back her this time around, including but not limited to co-producer/guitarist Scott Neubert, singer/guitarist Claire Lynch, Little Big Town bassist John Thomasson, GreenCards fiddler Eamon McLoughlin and Elvis Costello accordionist Jeff Taylor. Fans of hard country will love this.

The title track opens the album with a lush bed of acoustic guitars and an accordion solo that hands off to a pennywhistle – it's very Emmylou. with a little Celtic edge. M'Carver picks up the pace with the catchy newgrass tune *Bliss Creek* and then brings it down again with the sweet, sad waltz *You Say That You're Leaving*. "Promises bend, souls they grow thirsty and love stories end," she laments before the gorgeous blend of fiddle and pedal steel kicks in on the chorus.

Teardrops and Wine sounds like it's pretty self-explanatory, but it's not that simple, and the way M'Carver slides up to a note on the second chorus will give you chills. *Rodeo Clown* was inspired by M'Carver's second cousin, who is the genuine item – but the song casts the singer in the role of someone who's "always there to pick you up when you're knocked down." It's a neat twist. *Devil or Fool*, with its slow-burning, blues-drenched slide guitar, makes a stark contrast, taking its inspiration from M'Carver's many trips to Sugar Land prison to visit her brother, who was in for drugs and a probation violation.

It Never Gets Easy, a straight-up, backbeat country song with some memorable lead guitar, steel and fiddle work, ponders a frustrating relationship where "the heat of your touch turned everything else cold." *Redemption*, with its resigned blend of country gospel and Tex-Mex, takes a haunting look at dead-end despair and alienation and draws inspiration from the suicide of M'Carver's first husband. It contrasts with the next track, *There's Always Sorry*, a make-up song set to electric highway rock with a sizzling, spiraling guitar lead. The album winds up with the gentle, jazz-tinged countrypolitan waltz *Will You Show Me the Stars* – dedicated to M'Carver's astrophysicist husband of the last 25 years – and the vivid, picturesque post-breakup ballad *Another Goodbye Waltz*, something that Lucinda Williams would be proud to have written. M'Carver has several other purist albums to her credit and has toured with Jim Lauderdale; if she ever makes it up to NYC, you'll hear about it here.