

COUNTRY MUSIC

PEOPLE



GINA VILLALOBOS Rock 'N' Roll Pony

California / Not Enough / Why / What I'd Give / We Got It Slow / Fooling Around / Put The Message In The Box / I'm Alright / So Much For Dying / Faded / Trying To Find You / Can't Come Down

Producer: Gina Villalobos

Laughing Outlaw LORCD-89
(45:34)

★★★★

Gina Villalobos spent a number of years playing in the bands Liquid Sunshine, The Mades, and the garage-pop trio, Dragster Barbie (where she played drums) before embarking on a solo career in 2002 with the album, *Beg From Me*. Her second release, *Rock 'N' Roll Pony*, was released in 2004 in the US and has now been made available in the UK.

There is certainly a rock influence, as you would expect from an album of this title, but there is also a discernable country twang. This is firmly established from the very start with Sean Caffey's pedal steel introduction on the opening track, *California*.

When the country rock vibe is combined with Kevin Haaland's prominent electric lead guitar there are some similarities to The Rolling Stones' *Exile On Main Street* era. One can also discern shades of Lucinda Williams in Villalobos's voice and love of qualities as their meaning. One of the best examples of this is the natural rhythm of the words on *Faded*.

Her songs are vignettes rather than comprehensive narratives and they can sometimes be a shade enigmatic and ambiguous, but are always elegant and leave plenty of scope for the listener to use their imagination.

The mellifluous nature of Gina's lyrics allows her to use her voice in a very musical way. She can sing sweet and pure, but she also has a more raunchy edge on the rockier tracks. She is well supported by some solid performances including cameos from a number of musicians including Anne McCue on banjo.

The only thing that lets the album down is the rather flat, muddy production that often leaves Gina's voice languishing too far down in the mix, battling to be heard. This is a rare flaw in an exciting album from a talented songwriter and confident performer. See her when she tours the UK this month and next. (www.laughingoutlaw.com.au)

Michael Hingston