

POP MATTERS

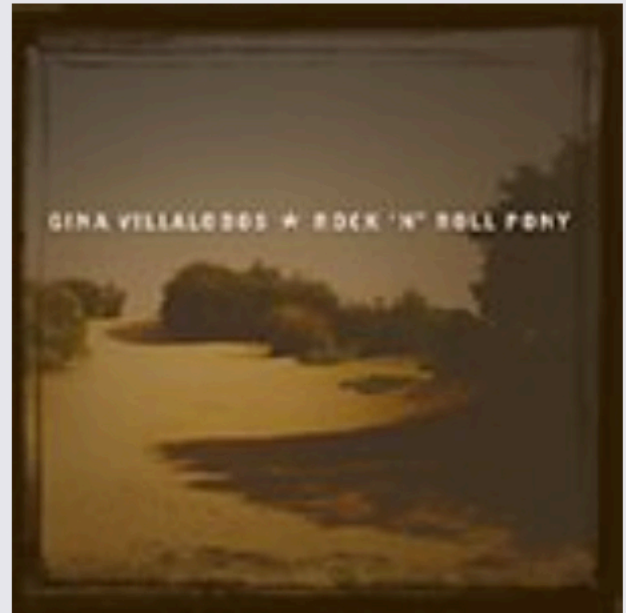
Forget the parallels that have been made between Gina Villalobos and the best in alt-country music -- Villalobos is the unquestionably the finest voice in the country-rock genre today. She is not a Lucinda Williams wanna-be, nor is she a Chrissie Hynde knockoff. The fact that critics are reaching into such considerable artistic territory to find fitting accolades for Villalobos is an indication of just how good she really is. Villalobos, if *Rock 'N' Roll Pony* garners the attention that it is likely to, is an artist that others will be compared to in the very near future.

Rock 'N' Roll Pony is a shining example of Villalobos's melodic sensibilities; her knack for placing just the right words alongside just the right chords is sheer verse-chorus-verse-bridge-chorus bliss. But Villalobos is not just a

phenomenal songwriter; her powerhouse voice is as original and distinct as her songs. Knowing when to whisper and when to unleash, she finesses words into new meaning with the slightest inflection. From the very first shimmering pedal steel cries on the opening track, "California", to the brilliant lyricism of "10 Million", we are truly swept away on a journey through life's triumphs and hardships. Gloriously drenched in rich acoustic guitar, pedal steel, twangy electric guitar highlights and the occasional banjo, this is as perfect as an alt-country/Americana rock album gets.

"Not Enough" swaggers with not-a-care-in-the-world attitude, hearkening back to the mid-'70s freedom of bars, friends, music and the occasional smoke. Villalobos conjures up images of the best jukebox in town, ice-cold dollar beers, and nights that were never long enough.

The intensity of "Why" opens with distorted guitar chords and builds enticingly through Villalobos's formidable vocal dynamism. When she howls, "Can you lift me up, without stealin' / Droppin' me down, into this feelin'," the sheer power of her gritty, rangy voice propels "Why" into a plaintive, bordering-on-anger grind of a song.



GINA VILLALOBOS
ROCK 'N' ROLL PONY

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