



B+ "Miles Away"  
Gina Villalobos  
Face West Records

While much of what comes out of Nashville these days seems more tilted toward the rock side of things than country, there's not much in the way of true country-rock hybrids these days. Gina Villalobos, who hails from Los Angeles, might not be able to reignite that country-rock genre all by herself, but her new album is surely a convincing argument that much remains to be mined in the territory between country and rock. Villalobos' distinctive vocals are the anchor here. Sweet but with a bit of a burr to the edge, her voice is the perfect vehicle for her smart, insightful lyrics. Her songs have as much twang as her voice, but are underpinned by a rock beat. The instrumentation falls somewhere in between, with electric guitar and bass supplemented by pedal steel guitar and fiddle. Still, it's the songs that make or break an album: Villalobos is an even better songwriter than she is singer. Elegant melodic themes mark the 10 tracks here, complemented by a complexity that gives the band something to work with. The last two tracks are as strong as the first two, and if there's a letdown in between it escaped your loyal correspondent. Anyone who likes a twangy groove combining rock and country is going to find "Miles Away" added to their stack of fave listens. Gina Villalobos plays Saturday night at Lestat's in San Diego.

\_\_\_\_ Jim Trageser \_\_ Staff Writer