



JO CAROL PIERCE

Dog Of Love

(self)

A NEW ALBUM arriving out of the blue from Jo Carol Pierce is like a miracle — an immaculate conception, a resurrection. The Lubbock-to-Austin transplant last (and first) released a recording in 1996, though the conceptual *Bad Girls Upset By The Truth* was as much chicken-fried performance art as a collection of songs. She'd been flushed from obscurity three years earlier by *Across The Great Divide: Songs Of Jo Carol Pierce*, in which a stellar array of Austin artists introduced songs celebrated among fellow Pierce fans to a wider public. Before that, she was known mainly as Jimmie Dale Gilmore's former wife.

An appreciation of her new work requires none of that an-

cient history — though, thematically, *Dog Of Love* feels like a belated follow-up chapter to *Bad Girls*. Even Pierce devotees will be surprised at how musically rich this song cycle is — as well as, no surprise, lyrically inspired. With production by veteran bassist Mark Andes (formerly of Spirit and Heart, now an Austin mainstay), guitar and songwriting collaboration from the great David Halley (and when will we hear another album from him?), and musical support as well as obvious inspiration from Blackie White, Pierce's husband (a.k.a. Guy Juke, renowned visual artist), Pierce has never sounded more melodically and vocally assured.

The predominant mode is Pierce's piano balladry, with disarmingly supple vocals ("Naked And Home", "Life Is Sweet", "Barb Wire Clown"). Other highlights range from the tremulous, poetic "You're So True" to the Brazilian-tinged "Quick-sand" to the guitar-driven propulsion of "Rock In My Shoe" to the blast-from-the-past "My Boyfriend" to the Stooges-with-a-smile title track. For fans,

this is holy communion, while initiates can receive their baptism here. — DON MCLEESE