

# *Heartsong Review*

Resource Guide for New Age Music of the Spirit

## **PATRICE O'NEILL**

**Elusive** \*\*\* (out of three)

Graced with a charmingly soft sweet voice, soulful wisdom and worldly compassion that cries out from her lyrics, Patrice O'Neill is another New Folk singer/songwriter from the Northwest. These songs here reflect a real depth of spirit and compassion that extends to both self and the world.

Road To Survival reveals the introspection that inspires her poetic talents: "The road to survival is never the easy way/and wise is the traveller who finds the narrow escape." Accompanied by guitar, keyboards, and guest artist David Michael's harp, the words are strikingly delivered in both peacefulness and with dramatic crashing timpani. Her voice comes out of this great quiet space inside, a voice that sings so well, with strength great enough to caress each word as it comes forth. Eleodora is a forceful acoustic rock song. While the music is something that would sound good late at night in the dark, the lyrics tell of her visit to a Latin American peasant woman who has lost both husband and farm to the repression in the land. For My Dad (in memory of her father) brought tears to my eyes: "Hands at the keys, we played our dreams/your heart taught me/I'd give it a try and you'd always smile/you love shaped me." A moving quiet finale to an emotional and spiritually rich album.

TECH NOTES: Excellent production, prof. pkg. Time: 55 min.

Reviewed by Don St. Clair

# PANDEMONIUM!

**PATRICE O'NEILL**  
Elusive (Yellow Tail)

Native singer/guitar player comes of age with debut CD full of Goddess beauty, harmony and beautiful songs to captivate. Patrice's voice is that of an angel – it defines beauty, and demands your attention.

On *Elusive*, Patrice demonstrates her unique ability to put together lovely and relaxing music. The songs free your mind and let you wander, just listening to her seduce the microphone. *Elusive* is the perfect title for this Adult Contemporary disc, as she seduces the listener with her heartfelt songs and wonderful voice. I could listen forever.

– Laura Horton

# Victory Review

ACOUSTIC MUSIC

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## **PATRICE O'NEILL: *ELUSIVE* CD**

YT 10007, Yellowtail, 9102 — 17th Ave. NE, Seattle, WA 98115

This album emotes elegance, grace and beauty in the tradition of Judy Collins. O'Neill's vocals are pure, warm and flowing while the arrangements deliver just the right touch of piano, rhythm and reeds for the mostly ballad songs. The originals are highly musical and not just simple progressions. David Lange's keyboards and arranging brings support and texture to every song. O'Neill's imagery and writing has matured, broadened; her voice is more assured as she simply states the images of "Midsummer Skies" in "Morning sun flowers out petals of fire to gild the whetted Cascades." Or she travels the "Road to Survival" where "wise is the traveler who finds the narrow escape." Her sense of survival, the essence of mercy, the development self worth, love and care of friends are themes placed along side her nurturing of third-world problems focused in the probing "Eleodora." Here one woman's tale is the cry of a generation and a country. Other highlights are the song "For My Dad" a personal salute to a major musical influence; and two sparse beauties in "Alive" with its lyrical spinning and "When Autumn Calls" sheer elegance. Sterling work and a must buy. Lyrics included. (Chris Lunn)

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# The Seattle Times

A WEEKLY PULLOUT GUIDE TO LOCAL ENTERTAINMENT

## Singer Patrice O'Neill: Stage fright? Who me?

### Concert preview

PATRICE O'NEILL, with Larry Murante, *The Antique Sandwich Company*, 5102 N. Pearl, Tacoma. Tonight, 8 p.m., \$6. 752-4069.

BY TOM PHALEN

*Special to The Seattle Times*

Patrice O'Neill has lived and worked in South Africa, Ecuador, Guatemala, New Jersey — where she was born — and Sequim, where she now makes her home. She began playing flute in the 4th grade and picked up the guitar in college where she formed a band and toured. She has sung since she was a teenager in churches and prisons and Rotary clubs. She has children. Patrice O'Neill's middle name should be "Courage."

But six years ago, she stood outside the Antique Sandwich Company on Open Mike night and almost decided not to go in. She was just plain scared. She didn't feel she was enough of a musician to perform, that she didn't have what it takes to do it, whatever that "it" really is. Fortunately, she took one more brave step into an uncertain new world and hasn't looked back.

O'Neill said recently that taking that step was as difficult as any she may have encountered in her life's travels.

"My dad was so afraid we'd get shot in South Africa or something," she recalled with a sweet, melodic laugh. "I told him, 'So what? If we died, we'd be dead and there'd be nothing to worry about.' Personally, I'd rather have faced a live bear in the wilds than the audience that night at the Antique, I was so afraid. And actually, I have faced a bear in the wilds and it wasn't nearly as bad . . ."

But what O'Neill found that night at the Antique Sandwich Company was support; a family of singers, musicians and their wide-ranging styles, people open to what she had to offer, who could nurture her gifts. She became involved in the

folk-music community, wrote and performed and eventually released an album of her own songs.

In 1992, O'Neill joined the Mel Cooleys led by Andrew Ratshin, and has continued to perform and record on her own. Her new CD, released on Ratshin's Yellow Tail Records, is interestingly titled "Elusive." The muse may sometimes be hard to grab and hold, but the old fear is gone.

"There is nothing I love more now than singing in front of an audience," she enthused "either on my own or with the Cooleys. Singing solo is still the hardest, because I think my guitar playing is my weakest asset. I get by, but I'd like to get better. With the Cooleys, all I have to worry about is singing, and Andrew gives us such great parts to sing."

O'Neill was talking during a rehearsal break with the Cooleys. In addition to a series of solo concerts she'd be undertaking to coincide with the release of her new record, she was also preparing for a series of October shows with the group.

"Andrew has composed a whole new show for us in all of two weeks. We're learning like 15 new songs. In fact, he made me hang around while he finished them up today. That was all right with me, I figured . . . I could stick my two cents in about what words I'd be singing. I don't usually get to do that."

O'Neill's own writing is from a traditional yet contemporary folk perspective. Her lyrics often evoke both natural and mystical images, but are never cloying. Her melodies are well defined and compelling.

On the new record she's accompanied by coproducer and keyboard player David Lange along with several others, but the arrangements remain uncluttered. Lange and bassist Dan Mohler are joining O'Neill for her live shows as well.

"All the arrangements you hear are David's," O'Neill said, "it's really his talent and having him with me is so much fun."

She added: "No, it isn't scary anymore."

# VICTORY REVIEW - PATRICE O'NEILL

## COVER FEATURE

Six years ago, unsure and feeling a bit lost, Patrice O'Neill hesitated outside the door to the Antique Sandwich Open Mike. She had come to play her music, to finally share the magic she had found, but lack of self belief and her personal circumstances were creating barriers. She just couldn't do it, she felt. But as she was leaving Susan of Dusty Rose came along and told her to go on in, "You have to sign up to play." Since then O'Neill has been on an exciting journey of music and self discovery. She immersed herself in the music and the community with an album, serving on the Victory Board, running music programs, writing and helping launch Wintergrass, joining Mel Cooley's and now releasing her outstanding album *Elusive*.

Patrice was born in New Jersey. "My dad was a piano player playing college dances. We moved around a lot so there seldom was a piano. My dad had a powerful influence, we would lie on the floor between speakers and listen to and analyze show tunes, Michelle Legrand and pop standards. In the 4th grade when we did have a piano I would play flute. I never sang anything. Singing was magic, something other people did."

At 16 in church, where everybody sang, she did too. "I went to this church that asked me to do a solo. I was a bit dumb and decided to do "Bridge Over Troubled Water" backed by a beginning guitar. I forgot the last verse and no one ever knew. That was the beginning of my performing in a very encouraging and warm environment. I sang a lot." Still she never thought of herself as a musician. After five years she was in college and put a band together where she learned to play guitar and toured. "We played in front of a lot of people and I got bit by the bug. I still didn't think I was a musician because I had only a smattering of training."

Patrice got married at nineteen in college. "I didn't do much music after that because it didn't fit in with my husband's perception. Musicians traveling around performing was not a traditional role for a wife for either of us. So I didn't do music. I resented that even at first. I was mad at him and at God. What was I suppose to do with myself now? I wanted to be a doctor. But I decided not to. I asked God "Will you please make up your mind?!" After a year in Africa we came back, had a baby and decided neither one of us wanted to live in LA. We moved to Sequim with another couple to start a church. It was a new start. Two months later the other couple moved away leaving us high and dry. My husband began to look into what he wanted to do. I decided I wanted to fill that space with music."

Patrice wrote two songs for a concert. "I waited until I had a performance to write. At the same time a group of women got together to sing a cappella and we sang together for eight years. We all had small children and didn't travel just sang locally in prisons, church, rotary club etc. We did Folklife once and I wanted to do this a whole lot more. They didn't and soon we parted ways. At this time I was drawn into relief and development work in third world countries. I worked for World Vision encouraging people to sponsor kids. I gave presentations, fielded questions. I did lots of research. They sent me to Equador and Guatemala and I got to see the stuff first hand, what really happens. This was very positive and I sang. But all this time I had a dream of singing in front of a group of people who really listened and supported the music. I had been booted out of my comfortable place, had lost my friends and things were difficult at home."

Patrice landed on the doorstep of the Antique. "I said at the doorstep I can't go in there, what am I doing here," still not thinking of herself as a musician. "But when I got inside and played the musicians and audience looked like the people in my dream. That had a profound impact on me. I had never studied music and was not exposed to a lot of styles until the Victory Open Mike. I began exploring this world I didn't know anything about. I discovered the freedom of performing and writing. I didn't know it was OK to write about anything. The atmosphere was so accepting, of many styles and types of people. It

was really, good emotionally. I began to think of myself as a musician and how to put things together. I did my first album with sort of a tunnel vision, to get a project done, something recorded. For years I thought I never could do that."

Four years later with a tremendous amount of people and music support she began a second album. Her self confidence soared. And so when her husband said she would have to choose music or the marriage, she chose music. This was no easy decision, but she made it, not in defiance but from a point of strength, self knowledge and profound belief.

"On the second recording I stayed in the details and process as long as possible to learn. David Lange was the most amazing teacher I ever had. He has knowledge and melts his heart around what he is working on. He doesn't impose, just makes the project full. He was wonderful for arranging, the recording process and making me a better player."

The solid writing, imagery, wonderful arranging and solid support delivered a major work into the Northwest music scene: "*Elusive*." The album reflects partially the growth, the pain and a strong spiritual feeling. "I explored things I was never allowed to write about, nothing radical. I was a much more mature writer. There is more variety and music in this recording. The best cuts for me are the emotion and musical content in the son for my dad. For personal reasons I like that one the best. "For When Autumn Calls" I like a lot. And in "Eleodora" it was the first time I exercised the voice in that way." It worked! "Images are goals of beauty, a wonderful thing pure and sweet. I like them and like to make those sounds. It was more than being a writer, I was drawn to things of beauty, things that could be celebrated in this life and world. As a soloist I do pretty stuff, I don't do angry stuff or dance music." This project was a catharsis and a release. "I had labored under certain expectations that I would always lose good things. This album was created from a lot of personal upheaval. I was able to finish and put a nasty demon to rest. By finishing this I was able to accept myself for who I am."

She had sent a tape to Andrew of Mel Cooleys who called me and asked about Patrice. Andrew said 'she doesn't do music in our style, but I keep going around humming her songs.' Patrice states "Mel Cooley's was a wonderful amazing gift to me. I wanted to sing more. So I sent this tape of to an anonymous group. It has been an absolute joy. It is powerful music that requires a lot of me. I love to do the harmonies. The exposure is phenomenal playing in front of two thousand people. I am working with people who are incredibly professional, know their stuff and are really good to work with. Also working with Andrew and Hilary at Yellowtail on the album has been superb. I would not have been able to do the CD version without them."

"I would like to do a limited amount of touring. I want to see Mel Cooleys do well. I don't want to be away from my kids too long. It is very important to me that the kids are healthy and secure. They are old enough now to know the music, my friends, help back stage, get bored and all that. They like Mel Cooleys a lot better than my own songs. They are proud of what I do and say mom has a CD. They give good advice and feedback. My daughter tries to help with my wardrobe but I am 'beyond hope.' She says 'Mom you're not going to wear that are you!' They have accepted the marriage separation and are part of my life in very nice way. They are my friends, but I haven't torn them away from what they know, just introduced other factors and concepts they can understand. I respect them a lot. There is nothing they don't know about mom. This is a great contrast to where things were before."

"A powerful reason for this album is David Lange and the incredible amount of work he did that I could not have done. I hope no one overlooks the music you hear on this album that is his creation. I feel like this is our album, not mine."

She brings care, compassion and heart to our music community as few ever have. Celebrate her, she is a treasure. (Chris Lunn)