

A WOMAN BORN TO BE A MUSICIAN

By Mike Lyons

While no career is a foregone conclusion, having an American folk legend for a father and growing up surrounded by many of the best singers of a generation could tend to stack the odds a little.

Meridian Green is the daughter of singer-songwriter Bob Gibson — whose own father was a singer — and as a child she had the chance to hear artists such as Mama Cass, the Lovin' Spoonful, Tim Hardin and Phil Ochs. Her first professional performance was as a guitarist with the Gypsy Gulch International String Band but as their show began to feature more of her vocals and her own songs, she eventually moved on to become a solo artist.

In 1986 she was joined by ex-Byrd and multi-instrumentalist Gene Parsons for what was to have been her first solo tour but instead became a lasting partnership. They married, and the following year — as Parsons Green — recorded their acclaimed *Birds of a Feather* album.

More recently the couple have set up their own StringBender Records label — named after the guitar gizmo invented by Parsons and now used by musicians all over the world — and last year she released her first solo album, in the *Heart of This Town*.

The album contains many of her own compositions, others co-written with Parsons, Jane Gilman's *Listen to the Thunder*, and a new version of her father's hit song, *Abilene*. The disc also features Parsons on a dazzling range of instruments, together with the likes of Bill Bottrell and Gib Guilbeau.



Featuring ten songs and running at 40 minutes, in the *Heart of This Town* perfectly showcases Meridian Green's delicately fluid vocal style which recalls legendary British folk singer Sandy Denny. It is a comparison which seems to surface in lyrical snippets and song snatches throughout the album, heightened by the inclusion of Green's *Where Does Time Go?* which echoes perhaps Denny's most famous song, *Who Knows Where the Time Goes?*

Lyrically, Green is an open book. These are not complex, multi-layered compositions but simple, even naïve songs which range from references from Dr. Seuss — *The Lorax* (in *Laytonville*) — or straightforward expressions of the artist's faith, such as in *Song for Sienna*.

In fact while a number of songs are about relationships (*Just Away*, *Sarah Lou*), several more are about the writer's relationship to a particular place, somewhere they must leave or would like to stay, or about the "sense" of being home.

The album opens with the mid-tempo *Listen to the Thunder*, very much a scene-setter for what will come and featuring Parsons on the StringBender guitar. It then comes as a pleasant surprise to find that second track, *Birds Fly South* — written by Green herself — is better, with its wonderful banjo picking and Uilleann bagpipe punctuation.

Parsons plays banjo and harmonica on the excellent *Just Away*, while *The Lorax* (in *Laytonville*), perversely, is Green at her most child-like and overtly political, using a Dr. Seuss character in a plea for environmental conservation. While *Sarah Lou* is a little too sentimental, *Song for Sienna* shows that simple expressions can cut deep, with its beautiful chorus and a sense of stark, almost naked honesty that is echoed throughout these songs: "You say I'm your one and only. Why then am I always lonely, full of secrets I'm afraid to share?" (*Just Away*).

After *Come on Wind*, there's *Where Does Time Go?* With its jazz-tinged acoustic guitar, and the marvelous clarinet-infused *Abilene* before *Hometown* closes the album with its upped beat and *la-la-la* chorus.

More ember than fireworks, in the *Heart of This Town*'s well-crafted songs and quiet beauty make it an impressive debut indeed.