

Music: Feature

Guthrie, Dylan ... Jones?

Rickie Lee discovers her inner protest singer

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REGISTERED DEMOCRAT: Rickie Lee Jones

If Howard Dean is too angry to be president, then it's a good thing Rickie Lee Jones is not running. The renegade pop singer, who scored hits with "Chuck E's in Love" and "We Belong Together," makes Dean seem downright warm and fuzzy when she starts hurling invective against President Bush.

"This man is blatant in his contempt for America," says Jones. "And coupled with a kind of low mental capability, this dumb, contemptuous mentality makes me crazy. As if to erase what we were and pretend we were always this new American: this voyeur, this 'Cops,' Fox News, 'Ricki Lake' shit, this division of poor and wealth that is staggering in its resolve to be so.

"Now Bush wants to bring in cheap illegal labor and make it legal -- destroy the little power unions have, destroy the working class in America and make them, too, a peasantry. Their idea that an elite shall rule the masses has never been so boldly naked."

Jones delivers this same frothing-at-the-mouth anger on her new album, *Evening of My Best Day*. On the disc, three of the 12 songs are political: "Ugly Man," "Tell Somebody (Repeal the Patriot Act)," and "Little Mysteries." Musically, the sophisticated melodies blend seamlessly with the rest of the CD. "Tell Somebody" even harks back to her funkier, finger-snapping melodies that made her a household name in the early 1980s. But lyrically, they clash with her usual bohemian poetry.

That does not bother Jones in the least. "I am not sure that [the political tracks] stand out more. I didn't worry about 'Skeletons' on *Pirates*, a song about the cops killing some guy, or 'A Stranger's Car' on *Traffic From*

Paradise, a song about the murder of a child. But 'Ugly Man' is an outstanding track, not for its content but for its music."

While, lyrically, "Ugly Man" and "Tell Somebody" don't delve much deeper than their titles, "Little Mysteries" revisits a conspiracy theory about the deaths of two politicians in plane crashes. The first involves Missouri's Democratic Gov. Mel Carnahan, whose plane, piloted by his son, went down about two weeks before the 2000 election. Carnahan had been running for a Senate position against then-incumbent Sen. John Ashcroft. Carnahan went on to win the election posthumously, and exiting Gov. Roger Wilson appointed Carnahan's wife to the position.

The second crash, two years later, involved Minnesota Sen. Paul Wellstone. Wellstone was a popular liberal who, while running for re-election in a close Senate race, was the only member of Congress to speak out against Bush's plans to go to war with Iraq. (Replacement candidate Walter Mondale ended up losing the election to Republican Norm Coleman.) Jones thinks the two crashes were more than just coincidence.

"I keep looking for the Republicans to go down, but I guess they just don't fly the same airlines as the Democrats. Or perhaps, it's the special mechanics for the private planes. They must use different mechanics."

While Jones' verbal tirades tend to focus more on feeling than fact, she gets more in depth on the website www.furnitureforthepeople.com. The site, which Jones set up with her friend, writer and photographer R.L. Pennyhead, sells merchandise and music (including hard-to-find Rickie Lee live discs), assists new musical artists and writers, offers a place for political discussion, and donates proceeds from its record sales and Furniture memberships (currently at about 300 strong) to various charitable recipients, such as the orphans of Sierra Leone.

"The goal was to create a small and strong community of friends and strangers to circulate music and news, to create good will," says Jones. "To offset the evil this Bush creates, in a small way, day by day."