

Reviews

Scott Miller

Ladies Auxiliary F.A.Y. RECORDINGS



Dating back to his early days with Knoxville, Tenn.'s V-Roys, **Scott Miller's** songwriting has always balanced wit with woe. Moving back home to tend cattle at his family's Virginia ranch hasn't changed that one bit, although settling into a regular touring trio with bassist **Bryn Davies** and fiddler **Rayna Gellert** led him to the full but pure sound his songs were seeking. (*Ladies Auxiliary's* studio band is rounded out by four more female players.) Opener "Epic Love" catches from the first listen, polished for radio as it slow-builds into layered harmonies. "This River's Yours/ This Valley's Mine" and "Someday/ Sometime" are classic emotive Miller—the latter taking full advantage of Gellert's soaring violin. Miller's storytelling traditionally draws from Appalachian geography, but it's only evidenced here on the rolling "Ten Miles Down the Nine Mile Road" (a songwriting collaboration with **Robin and Linda Williams**) and "Lo Siento, Spanishburg, WVA," a Miller classic that he rerecorded (and improved, despite the removal of the "all of y'all can just fuck off" closing sing-along). There's plenty of humor here though, including the honky-tonk "Jacki With an Eye" and the barroom piano-driven "Mother-in-Law." Miller delivers a haunting take on Bill Monroe's "With Body and Soul," but it's on sleeper track "Middle Man" that he's at his lyrical best—"Am I able, or is it just Cain around here?" he asks, while in closing, he sings, "They raise taxes on all the hillbillies round here/ To put camels through the eyes of big needles round here." Miller is a consummate storyteller, merging historical fiction into love and loss, peppered with clever bon mots. On *Ladies Auxiliary*, he testifies, proving that the farming life is good for songwriting. *Stratton Lawrence*