



Post Script is a new initiative of Artspeak,designed to encourage the development of innovative critical writing about the visual arts by Vancouver writers,to provide critical feedback to emerging and mid-career artists and to further enhance cross-fertilization of ideas between the visual art and writing community.

Information about this exhibition is available on-line at www.artspeak.ca



Althea Thauberger
Songstress

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Donato Mancini on
Althea Thauberger

Songstress



In their approach to self-marketing¹ amateur songstresses often try to mimic professional marketing. *Pain is slow, I watch it pass.*² Each tends to assert her eligibilities as loving (imaginary) and commodity (real) choice: sex appeal and musical talent. *And it burns my heart when you say it's broken.*

In music-videos of well-known women singers, the quality of the song and the quality of the body singing it are given together as the quality of the person. *I walked down a hill that took me to my home.* Few actually measure up to big-budget beauty standards without the help of expensive photographers. *My fist clenched,I can't let go.*

Far more hit songs exist about losing than finding someone, though musical talent is supposed to make you attractive. *You can't hold on to what's not yours.* If we judge by lyrics,in fact,the music world is a vast singles-club. *I felt your golden touch.*

Because it's so difficult to self-market, budding songstresses get help from coldly generous hacks. "Natasha Gaynes' voice, her playing,her songs all come together as a manifestation of who she is and what she feels"³ could be the hook-line of a

desperate personals ad,if changed to first-person. *The scent of your hair is a translucent fingerprint.*

Thauberger makes her songstresses even more alone than that. *But as morals die, sun is your disguise.* She abandons them to confront the camera through ruthless,unbroken takes. Stumbling over rocks, fidgeting during instrumental breaks,none of the polished prose of editing intervenes to protect. *Laid in the stretcher of time.* The raw, clear recordings reveal flaws in the songs careful production would hide. *The earth in me is changing.*

It's not obvious,either, why the songs are so uneven in *Songstress*. *I hear a crash and screaming all around.* Young people can write good songs. *I feel sunshine coming today.* If the songs were a notch better, questions of why these women chose to participate would be mute; we'd assume for self-promotion. *A tired laughing old man,a small dark café.*

Some of the songs would succeed on the radio, with the right props. *The wonders I have come to know.* Others simply aren't photogenic enough, i.e. she's great live, the albums suck. *And I know that emptiness consuming you.* Lacking greater experience or

budgets,all the singers of *Songstress* can do is convince us of the total earnestness of their appeal, and all of them do. *I prayed to God:let me in.* Their vulnerability shatters our protective irony.

Ask them: why do you want to be a singer? *I'm moving through bright tunnels of light.* Not many people can write good songs, and most could still love someone who writes lousy songs,as long as they get to know the person first. *Left for the circus in my mind.*

The hippies in *Songstress* are far the best self-marketresses and (notice) they are also the happiest. *I'm covered in bruises, a purple I can kiss.* This is partly because they take the natural settings as part of their outfits. *Join me in dreaming lightning.* But mainly it's because they aren't singing about relationships;they have a direct line on a particular audience, not you. *Wind blows away the cold.*

Donato Mancini
07/11/02

¹ (view personal web-pages through femmusic.com or gogirlsmusic.com)
² all italicized lines are quotes from songs in *Songstress*
³ (femmusic.com or gogirlsmusic.com)