

About nine years ago, my significant other and I glommed on to a group of musicians calling themselves, “The Folk Club.” We don’t really play anything, but we sing along and they don’t seem to mind. Recently, on my 50th birthday, the facilitator of the group asked if I had a request. I told them I really like it when Marge sings Joni Mitchell. Marge obliged. Little did I know that that piece would become the title song to Marge Weber’s debut album, “The Circle Game.” Weighing in at a tender 79 years young, Marge Weber has opened her recording career with an album of cover songs

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written by artists as varied as Joni Mitchell, Tom Waits (Joni Mitchell and Tom Waits together - a dream come true), Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger and a host of others.

Marge sings and plays acoustic guitar on all tracks and is accompanied, both vocally and instrumentally, by the aforementioned Folk Club facilitator, Mark Dvorak. Dvorak also produced the album, and Marge and Mark arranged the songs jointly. Essentially, this is a two person project. But, don’t let the size of the group fool you. These two obviously worked well together. The end product is simple and elegant. This pairing make a small but mighty team.

The title song is also the opener, Mitchell’s famous song about getting older (or is it about watching our kids get older?). Marge’s voice is clear and pretty. The guitar play is simple, but that only magnifies the presentation of the song. Simplicity can often pound the message home better than an Eddie Van Halen lead.

On Iris Dement’s, “Let the Mystery Be,” Marge’s voice is both cool and haunting, while still delivering with a touch of humor. The theme of the song is, let’s just live in the moment, and not get caught up in what’s happened or what’s going to happen. Again, the presentation’s the thing.

Marge touches on an array of emotions when she presents “The Long Way Home” (by Tom Waits, but more recently recorded by Norah Jones), “Make You Feel my Love” (Bob Dylan) and “Old Devil Time” (Pete Seeger). She gives us a taste of gospel with, “Lord, I’ve Got Some Singing to Do” (Robert Schmertz). And, as many good folk singers will, she gives us a children’s song, written by Wisconsin’s Larry Penn called, “On My Grandma’s Patchwork Quilt.” It’s true what they say, variety is the spice of life, and in folk music, it’s almost mandatory.

A personal favorite of mine is Ed McCurdy’s anti-war song, “Last Night I had the Strangest Dream.” I got turned on to this song on Simon & Garfunkel’s first album. Marge’s voice almost brings a tear to the eye. Perhaps this song is good luck for debut albums.

Similar in theme to the title song is the Mark Erelli/Catie Curtis song, “Passing Through.” The theme, like “Circle Game” is we’re here a short while, let’s make the most of it and leave things better than we found them. This may be the best-presented song on the album. Again, Marge’s voice is pretty and poignant, and makes the listener feel she’s singing just for him/her.

When all’s said and done, this is a pretty remarkable album. Not just as a debut album of “for a first effort.” No, it’s just good music to listen to. And we have Marge to thank for it. When Marge signed my copy for me, she signed it, “We’re all just passing through.”

Ain’t it the truth.

Paul Schingle is a Chicago writer who occasionally reviews musical performances and recording projects. Read more of his work at http://www.helium.com/users/211272/show_articles