

Sterling Silver
by Ali Marcus

It's been many years since Devon Sproule first charmed Charlottesville, VA with her intricate songwriting and stunning vocal style. Ms. Sproule's music evokes a pastoral America full of sublime views and cozy vignettes. At the age of 25, she has mastered the art of lifting surfaces to momentarily reveal a lazy afternoon or a sun-flecked stream.

Keep Your Silver Shined, released on City Salvage Records, is produced by Charlottesville musician and producer Jeff Romano, and performed by an impressive array of talent. Gorgeous clarinet solos from John Winn, pedal steel from Charlie Bell, and accordion from Matty Metcalfe provide a quirky, vintage cast of characters that set the mood. The most influential collaborator on the record is Paul Curreri, not in the least because of his musical contributions, but more importantly as the presumed inspiration for the album. Sproule and Curreri were married in 2005, and shades of their wedding and relationship saturate the album from start to finish. It's rare for pure domestic bliss to form the foundation - no, the centerpiece - of a record. Ms. Sproule's lyrics and performance have such a commanding presence, one can't help but wish herself alongside, singing to the Blue Ridge and the setting sun.

If, like this writer, you happen to have had the chance to live in Charlottesville, the imagery on the album feels like parts of your own memory being sung back to you, between shout-outs to local bars and brews, and visions of the Virginia landscape. If you have not had the pleasure, it's no matter. Devon Sproule's singular cadence and practiced improvisational style conjure up a world that will take you in just as if you were born and raised in Albemarle County.

I've got family in Canada, family in New York
I've got friends in every other place I've played
But I can't keep from planting all my plans of family stuff
Down between the weeds in the red dirt clay
- Devon Sproule

Beginning with "Old Virginia Block," a cacophony of old-fashioned country, we are immediately confronted with characteristically unhinged rhythms and melodies. There is a looseness in Ms. Sproule's execution that is deceptively lighthearted. In this song and throughout, what starts as a simple foot-tapper or a calm daydream usually ends with a burst of adrenaline, a twinge of anxiety, or sheer joy. Even with sparse arrangements and a distinctly playful tone, the songs consistently surprise with passion and intensity.

The record's best track is easily "1340 Chesapeake St," highlighting Devon's run-on-sentence brilliance, always leaving you wondering how she finds time to breathe. Listening to these lyrics is like watching dust floating in a ray of sunlight - her words ramble, never settling on one note or syllable, and they don't ever seem as though they are susceptible to gravity.

"Does The Day Feel Long?" has the same rambling quality. Laced with powerful sailboat imagery ("So you say, 'Hey, can you hear me? My land, come near me! My love, my song, don't leave me alone!'", it's like that dream that made sense last night, though you can never remember when you wake in the morning.

Prevailing jazz vocals give way to the folk which came before on "Weeping Willow." All the stops are pulled out of this traditional gem - Romano on bass harmonica, and three-part harmony with husband Curreri and the legendary Mary Chapin-Carpenter, another Albemarle County resident.

Keep Your Silver Shined is truly an ensemble achievement. The sheer loveliness of the melodies and lyrics is so perfectly matched to the space between instruments and understated arrangements. The record creates a

place that will soothe and inspire all who enter. With Devon at the helm of this ship, we can be sure that its winds will continue to be strong and its travels many.