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## Jones goes for what she wants on second CD

Continued from page 1D either. Jones trusts her band mates, and two years in the studio and on the road have forged ensemble empathy that belies her own sudden stardom. There is no song on the album titled "Feels Like Home." For Jones, it's a state of mind.

Where the mostly downtempo, ballad-heavy "Come Away With Me" was a tad too mellow, the new album has a bit more energy, and more varied rhythms, whether it's the lightly sauntering "Sunrise" and "Long Walk Home," the bluegrass jauntiness of "Creepin' In" (a duet with Dolly Parton) or the bluesy plaintiveness of "In the Morning" and "Above Ground," neither of which would sound out of place on a Bonnie Raitt album.

Make no mistake: Norah Jones is a pop singer. That she records for Blue Note, a legendary jazz label, seems to confuse people, as does the fact that her CV includes jazz studies at the University of North Texas. No doubt Jones loves jazz, particularly the great jazz vocalists of the 40s and 50s, but at this stage she shows no particular ambition to go that route either vocally or in her keyboard work, which is never showy or busy. As a pianist, Jones is given to rolling accents and subtle support chords (she gets a little

funkier on the Wurlitzer organ)

One of the few displays of her instrumental skills is the album's closer, "Don't Miss You at All," where Jones has added her own ruminative lyrics to a brooding Duke Ellington instrumental, "Melancholia." Ellington Ellington wrote memorable pop tunes, and if you listen to his solo recording on 1953's "Piano Reflections," you'll hear elegant sorrow gently articulated. Jones, also working alone, deftly taps into that mood with a touch as light as Ellington's. Half original, "Don't Miss You at All" is as close to a standard as one will find on the new album.

The other covers she chose are less familiar than those on her first CD. Jones slows down tragic Texas troubadour Townes Van Zandt's already languid "Be Here to Love Me," first recorded a decade before she was born. Van Zandt was no stranger to blues — he killed himself in 1997 — but he was also one of the finest chroniclers of romantic vulnerability, and when Jones wearily begs "Just hold me and tell me that you'll be here to love me today" with Garth Hudson's accordion dancing lightly behind her, she taps into universal needs. "The Long Way Home" is a Tom Waits-Kathleen Brennan song that first appeared on

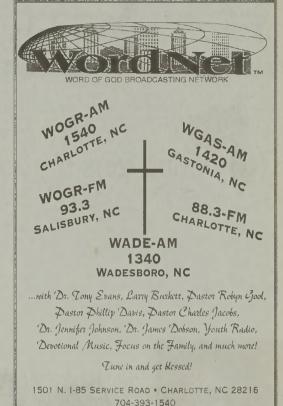
the 2002 soundtrack for "Big Bad Love," and Jones pretty much follows the same loping country gait of Waits's recording, though her version is a lot easier on the ears as she pits the security of a loving relationship against the lure of the road.

It's probably too early to get a fix on Jones as a songwriter and lyricist, but her only solo effort, "What Am I to You?," is one of the album's strongest tracks, a weary demand for romantic reassurance featuring bluesy Hammond organ, shuffling drums from the Band's Garth Hudson and Levon Helm and twangy guitar by Tony Scherr. Jones's work with Alexander is also quite strong: "Sunrise" rides a galloping bass and rolling piano as a lover offers cool celebration "when I see we made it through another day, "while "Toes" has a Nick Drakestyle unhurriedness as Jones reflects on taking a chance on love, or on life.

A third Jones-Alexander collaboration, "Carnival Town," conjures hazy melancholy that's equal parts Hoagy Carmichael and Kate and Anna McGarrigle, with shimmering harmonies and subtle strings that quietly mesmerize.

The album's emotional centerpiece is "Humble Me." Built around author Kevin Breit's resonator guitar and Jones's archaic pump organ, it's one of the most haunting, harrowing songs about familial dislocation in moons too blue to count, a spare, slow waltz that captures the haunted hopelessness of fractured love and torn fam-

Like "Come Away With Me," "Feels Like Home" takes time to reveal itself, and the process will be a little slower only because the new album lacks the instant emotional hook of a "Don't Know Why." On the other hand, the more you listen to "Feels Like Home," the more you'll understand why Norah Jones titled it that



## 'Shakin' at AACT

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the AACT. "In this story there are eight women who are shaping the lives of one 12-year-old child. One of the main characters is Big Momma, the biological grandmother of the girl whose mother dies.

Womack says the production shows the dynamics of the black experience when it comes to black girls.

"It's a very moving and funny play. Some of the characters talk about different experiences in their lives," she said. "They speak of their pain but they turn their pain into lemonade. You know how the saying goes if life gives you lemons you make lemonade. The women also let the girl know that she can get through anything.

It sheds light on the black experience without being too dark, deep and melodramatic. It's a cross between "A Raisin In the Sun," Brewster's Place" and "Ma Dear." It's an all-female cast but it's for everybody.





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