



STEPHEN IDE/The Patriot Ledger

Eliza Gilkyson's new CD is called "Land of Milk and Honey."

# Gilkyson stirs soul in 'Milk and Honey'

It's relatively common for a performer to write about feelings and relationships and pass for a contemporary singer-songwriter.

But it takes a unique and inspired writer to take a stand, to observe and report, to stir the soul with smart lyrics about the human condition all set to memorable melodies.

Eliza Gilkyson's latest took my breath away.

"Land of Milk and Honey" (Red House, [redhouserecords.com](http://redhouserecords.com), [elizagilkyson.com](http://elizagilkyson.com)), is a powerful, poetic and addicting collection of country-folk and rock. I found myself listening to it over and over, finding nuance where at first I heard just a catchy melody.

Her songs have Guthrie-esque strength, the honesty and vocal purity of Gillian Welch and a wellspring of melody and self-assured presentation on acoustic guitar and piano that stem from her musical roots.

The daughter of the late acclaimed songwriter Terry Gilkyson ("Greenfields" and "The Bare Necessities"), her third Red House release (her eighth overall) is a touch darker than previous CDs. Her messages ride the line between the social and the political, culminating with an anthemic call for peace in Woody Guthrie's "Peace Call," with added vocals from Patty Griffin, Mary Chapin Carpenter and Iris Dement. The song, published more than 40 years ago, had never been released.

Gilkyson, currently on tour in Holland, was moved by a photo of a boy diving into a smelting plant waste pool along the Albania/Kosovo border to pen "Tender Mercies," a touching mother's prayer with goose-flesh-raising harmony vocals from Gilkyson's children, Cisco Ryder and Cordelia Castillo:

"Down below the factory along the riverside / children swimming in a poison pool / playful afternoon of unintended suicide / gone before they ever even knew."

The photo became the CD's cover.

Songs like rolling "Hiway 9," with its snappy steel guitar and added vocals from Slaid Cleaves, speak of the clash between the take-what-you-will, fuel-driven modern era and the

## CD REVIEW

### LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

Eliza Gilkyson (Red House Records)

Middle East: "between the Tigris and Euphrates it's a lot like hell / go on and liberate my people and their o-i-l."

Others reveal the human condition. "Dark Side of Town," with its passionate horn section, has a rousing chorus in the tale of a drunken backslider. The tender, more folksy "Ballad of Yvonne Johnson" tells of an abusive relationship that led to tragedy, as it builds musically from simple guitar to a crescendo of instruments.

Amid the dreariness that permeates the themes of several songs, Gilkyson's rollicking and hopeful "Wonderland" shines. The electric guitar work (Jon Dee Graham, Mike Hardwick) in this, and in her empowering "Not Lonely," remind me of Rumours-era Fleetwood Mac.

Gilkyson also offers a delightful, uplifting nod to her father, whose "Runnin Away," rings of a traditional muse showing the human connection to other species.

While the title track expounds on the foolishness of mortal man, there is no foolishness in taking stock of Gilkyson's work, which is laudable and timeless.

—STEPHEN A. IDE  
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