

reviews [pop . rock . soul]

Miranda Lee Richards
"The Herethereafter"
Virgin Records

Rating: 4 discs
Reviewer: Albert Bender

A home run over the bleachers and out of the stadium--not bad for first time up in the big leagues. Miranda Lee Richards, with her release of The Herethereafter, immediately establishes herself as a force majeure in the world of pop music. Like Jennifer Nobel (Grey Eye Glances), Richards combines a hauntingly beautiful voice with equally impressive music and lyrics. Too often, "artists" compensate their lack of talent by breathing and moaning in our ears, and their albums are nothing more than 45-minute obscene phone calls. Here, however, is a recording that enchants and captivates, rather than assaults, our senses.

Richards, a 26-year-old native of San Francisco, is the writer or co-writer of the ten original songs. The only cover is a cute, albeit forgettable version of the Rolling Stones' "Dandelion." With her own material of such fine quality, Richards needs not draw from anyone else. On the contrary, she and co-producer Rick Parker write wonderful melodies that range from the countryish "The Long Goodbye" to the dreamy, Enya-esque harmony incorporated in "Ella." Add to that some vivid images ("black stallions run 'neath the light of the moon" or "Delicate as a rose/With my raven hair and fiery eyes"), and you have a collection of work that indeed stands on its own merit.

The Herethereafter is an album you will play again and again, becoming more impressed each time. Songs you at first deem good elevate to great, and the great vault to awesome. "Seven Hours," Richards' magnum opus, combines a plaintive guitar with an intense rock motif and psychedelic percussion. The effect is mesmerizing.

All of that from a rookie? Remember, there was home run number one for both Hank Aaron and Babe Ruth on their way to Cooperstown. And if this debut is any indication, Miranda Lee Richards is destined to grace another Hall of Fame in Cleveland.