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Webb and Friends Revisit a Great American Songbook

Brian Wilson, Keith Urban and more join master songwriter

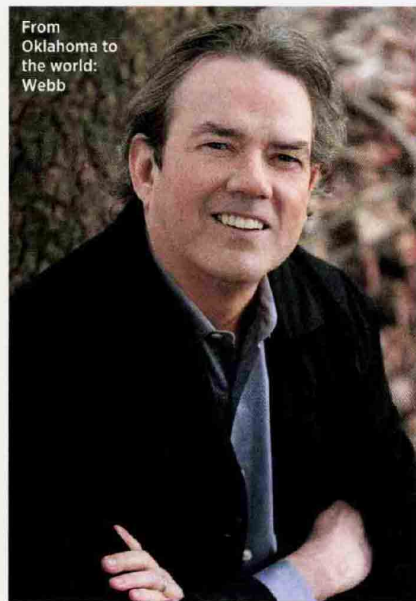
Jimmy Webb

Still Within the Sound of My Voice

eOne ★★★★★



For well over four decades, Jimmy Webb's songs have helped shape the American musical landscape. And "landscape" is the operative term. A native of Oklahoma, Webb imbues his songs with a cinematic expansiveness and a musical sophistica-



From Oklahoma to the world: Webb

tion that smooths the edges of his rootsy sources. They sometimes evoke specific places - "Wichita Lineman," "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" - but more often Webb's songs summon an internal realm of the imagination. Yearning and regret loom large in Webb's songbook, as does a particular kind of American loneliness, the emotional flip side of the country's obsession with individualism. His work uniquely explores how it's possible to feel so alone, regardless of whether you're finding love or losing it.

All this is indelibly clear on *Still Within the Sound of My Voice*, an equally appealing follow-up to Webb's 2010 release *Just Across the River*. The two albums work on the same premise: Prominent singers - in this case, Lyle Lovett, Keith Urban, Kris Kristofferson, Art Garfunkel, Joe Cocker and Brian Wilson, among others - join Webb for duets on some of his greatest tracks. It's a tribute to Webb's craftsmanship and the depth of his catalog that after 27 songs, the quality of the selections on these two albums has not dipped a notch. And it's a testament to the power of Webb's own highly

personal, granular style of singing that none of those high-profile guests ever quite overshadows Webb himself.

Producer Fred Mollin provides atmospheric, country-tinged settings throughout *Still Within the Sound of My Own Voice*,

KEY TRACKS: "Elvis and Me," "If These Walls Could Speak," "MacArthur Park"

lending consistency to the wide range of performers and material. Carly Simon offers eerily intimate accompaniment on "Easy for You to Say," and Marc Cohn brings a comforting reassurance to "Another Lullaby." Graham Nash and David Crosby deliver characteristically eloquent harmonies on "If These Walls Could Speak," and the Jordanaires, who long ago served as Elvis Presley's backup singers, add personal texture to "Elvis and Me," Webb's moving reminiscence of the time he met the King.

The high point is a trenchant version of Webb's classic hit "MacArthur Park," on which Wilson's Beach Boys-style backing vocals, Mollin's Americana touches and Webb's own craggy recitation both reinvent a classic and capture its timelessness. Really, that's true of this entire album, proof that more than a decade into the 21st century, we are all still within the sound of Webb's endlessly alluring songwriting voice.

ANTHONY DECURTIS