

Grammy-winner Shawn Colvin will take the stage Saturday at the Garde

Oct 18, 2007 @ 05:21 PM

By ALAN SCULLEY

For the Norwich Bulletin

ASHFORD -

Shawn Colvin often refers to her previous album, "Whole New You," as her "pop" album. And pop, in this case, might as well be a four-letter word.

That 2001 CD followed a commercial breakthrough for Colvin. Her 1999 album, "A Few Small Repairs," gave Colvin her first pop radio hit with "Sunny Came Home," and she won two Grammys — for Song and Record of the Year.

The impact of "A Few Small Repairs" was felt all the way through the making of "Whole New You," by both Colvin and her songwriting partner/producer John Leventhal, and the album and Colvin's commercial fortunes suffered as a result.

"'Whole New You,' we felt pressure," Colvin said in a recent phone interview. "We tried to deny that we did, but we did. So it kind of felt like we were looking over our shoulders. I think we did some interesting work on there, but I know there was an element of fear and feeling blocked."

"There are a couple of songs I do (in concerts) from it, but the record was so poorly received by the record company and given no help at all," she added. "It sold so badly, it's just not what people ask to hear ... So I put one or two in there, but it's — a lot of those songs got wasted."

Colvin has no such regrets about her latest album, "These Four Walls." Released last fall, the album marks a return to a more stripped back, more acoustic-centric sound — a good move for a singer such as Colvin, whose lyrics and sweet, youthful vocals have always been primary attractions for her music.

The new songs work, of course, because Colvin and Leventhal once again marry compelling lyrics to strong and unencumbered melodies. Most of the material ("Summer Dress," "These Four Walls" and "Venetian Blue") is fairly delicate and musically melancholy, although "Tuff Kid" and "The Bird" rock a bit and a couple of tunes — "Fill Me Up" and "Let It Slide" — have some of the breeziness of "Whole New You."

Colvin openly admits her songwriting on "These Four Walls," her first album under a new deal with Nonesuch Records after five albums on Columbia Records, isn't as personal or autobiographical as on earlier albums. And she is happy to say she wouldn't want it any other way.

"When I was younger, I was much more prone to take the drama and the discomfort in my life and express it in my lyrics and the music," said Colvin, a single mother with an 8-year-old daughter. "It was a real outlet. That just doesn't (happen as much), there's less drama, for one thing."

That doesn't mean Colvin's writing has become boring. Far from it, as she remains a talented lyricist, capable of creating emotionally evocative portraits of people and situations and honing in on emotions and desires that go to the core of the human experience.

And Colvin still doesn't shy away from personal territory when she thinks it's appropriate. In fact, one of her new songs — "Tuff Kid" — may be as thorny as any song Colvin has written, to the point where it has caused some tensions, particularly with her mother.

It's little wonder. "Tuff Kid" centers on Colvin's difficult relationship with her parents, who struggled to understand and know how to deal with the artist's temperament Colvin showed even as a young child.

One verse is particularly telling:

"My mama had me/But she didn't get me/I guess I broke her at the age of 5/My daddy hit me/But he couldn't quit me/We showed each other how to feel alive."

Colvin admits she wrestled with whether to release "Tuff Kid" before deciding many fans might identify with the song's central themes of parental turmoil and the need to find a nurturing refuge among friends.

"My father and I made peace about things a long time ago, and my mother doesn't like the world to know our business," Colvin said. "And you know, it's hurtful to her. It's questionable, my doing this. It is, and I can't really defend it. When I do a piece of work like that, I feel on some level, it's not so specific, I just feel tons of people can relate to that, this feeling alienated for certain reasons in their own home when they're teen-agers or whatever. Their friends are their salvation. That's why they connect to.

That's who understands them. And everything's in there."

IF YOU GO

- **What:** Shawn Colvin in concert
- **When:** 8 p.m., Saturday
- **Where:** Garde Arts Center
325 State St., New London
- **Price:** \$30, \$35.
- For more informatin and tickets, call **444-7373** or e-mail **info@gardearts.org**