

Susanna Van Tassel

From CMT.com

Susanna Van Tassel earned initial respect within the neo-traditionalist country scene during the early 2000s for both her songwriting and her singing. Originally rooted in California, Van Tassel moved from Santa Rosa to Austin, TX, in 1995 to further her career as a country artist. In Austin she polished her craft, infusing her neo-traditionalist songwriting style with a hearty dose of honky-tonk and incorporating occasional old-timey songs into her performances, yet did so without seeming ostensibly retro. Following contributions to compilations such as *Pushing the Norton* and *The Edge of Country*, she debuted with a solo album in 2000, *The Heart I Wear*, and followed with another in 2002, *My Little Star*.

~ Jason Birchmeier, All Music Guide

From The Austin Chronicle

My Little Star (The Music Room) There's something almost eerie, or otherworldly, about Susanna Van Tassel's voice. Human voices crack, croak, sputter, and fail, but hers doesn't. It's as pure as a stream that might flow through the "golden rolling hills" of her idyllic "On the Hill." In any case, Van Tassel's honey-coated soprano is as good a reason as any for the phrase "honky-tonk angel" to exist. Better yet, this second album shows the local honky-tonker becoming as strong a songwriter as she is a singer. Penning all but one of the album's 12 tracks, she tackles familiar country subject matter (family and fidelity, mostly) with a perspective that nurtures familiarity without falling into cliché -- she even gets away with a lullaby to her young son on the moonlit title track. As most albums produced by Jim Stringer, the arrangements on *My Little Star* are impeccable, particularly the combined pedal-steel talents of Marty Muse, Kevin Owens, and Tommy Detamore, but also Meat Purveyor Pete Stiles for a delicate mandolin turn on "I Had a Feeling." Still, it all comes back to Van Tassel's voice, and whether gliding through the swamp-poppy "Takin' My Time," giving it some extra gas on "A Love That's True," or negotiating the only five-syllable word in country-music history on Mel Tillis' "Unmitigated Gall," it's one for the ages. One minor criticism: If the bright lights and temporary heartache cures of "Closing Time" can seduce this heavenly creature, what hope is there for the rest of us?

★★★★

- Christopher Gray