Odetta - My Eyes Have Seen (1959)



01. Poor Little Jesus – 1:54
02. Bald Headed Woman – 2:20
03. Motherless Children – 2:10
04. I Know Where I'm Going – 2:00
05. The Foggy Dew (Canon Charles O'Neill) – 5:29
06. I've Been Driving On Bald Mountain/Water Boy (Avery Robinson) – 6:54
07. Ox-Driver Song – 2:34
08. Down On Me – 2:55
09. Saro Jane – 2:45
10. Three Pigs – 1:18
11. No More Cane On The Brazos – 3:38
12. Jumpin' Judy – 2:26
13. Battle Hymn Of The Republic (Julia Howe Ward) – 3:52

Personnel:
- Odetta Holmes – vocals, guitar
- Bill Lee – bass
- Milton Okun - choir, chorus

While it might be hard for a post-millennium roots fan to understand, Odetta -- in her heyday -- was the kind of folk artist who drove purists crazy. With her resonate vocals and her choice of material, she seemed like the perfect link between older performers like Leadbelly and the folk movement of the late '50s. At the same time, Odetta had studied music in college and had no intention of being hemmed in by what a small group of white men thought about tradition. Released in 1959, My Eyes Have Seen was the first album that revealed her split nature. It starts simple enough, with a straight version of "Poor Little Jesus," and includes a number of other traditional songs like "Down on Me" and "The Foggy Dew." The trouble starts, however, on the second cut, with "Bald Headed Woman." Even though the song is sung a cappella, a

scribe at Sing Out! complained because of the heavy use of an echo chamber. This was nothing, however, compared to the backup singers that accompany Odetta on "Motherless Children," "Ox-Driver Song," and the title cut. Clearly, the sentinels of authenticity noted, no traditional artist felt it was necessary to add choral accompaniment to their material. At the same time, these renditions are presented in a tasteful manner, and Odetta -- even at her most experimental -- can hardly be compared to the Kingston Trio or the Limeliters. My Eyes Have Seen is a nice portrait of a performer bucking conformity as she stretches her artistic legs a bit. --- Ronnie D. Lankford, Jr., allmusic.com

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