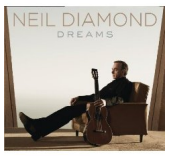
Neil Diamond - Dreams (2010)



1. Ain't No Sunshine 3:37 *play*
2. Blackbird 3:22
3. Alone Again (Naturally) 3:57
4. Feels Like Home 4:51 *play*
5. Midnight Train To Georgia 5:00
6. I'm A Believer 4:27
7. Love Song 3:58
8. Losing You 3:16
9. Hallelujah 4:10
10.A Song For You 4:31
11.Yesterday 3:31
12.Let It Be Me 3:19
13.Desperado 3:36
14.Don't Forget Me 3:23
Neil Diamond Composer, Guitar, Vocals John Fumo Flugelhorn, Trumpet Tom Hensley Horn Arrangements, Piano Hadley Hockensmith Guitar King Errisson Percussion Andrew Klein Bassoon Larry Klimas Flute, Sax (Tenor) Alan Lindgren Arranger, Hammond B3, Piano Donald Markese Clarinet, Sax (Alto), Sax (Baritone), Sax (Tenor) Joseph Meyer French Horn Tommy Morgan Harmonica Reinie Press Bass Timothy B. Schmit Vocal Harmony Robert Shulgold Flute Joseph Stone Oboe Benmont Tench Piano Art Velasco Trombone, Trombone (Bass) Gabriel Witcher Fiddle

After two excellent collaborations with Rick Rubin, Neil Diamond can't resist taking the production reins himself for this collection of (mostly) covers. His liner notes claim these songs as some of his favorites from the "rock era" -- implying it's over. While this set is more intimate than most of his overblown production of the last 30 years, it is a step away from the simplicity of his work with Rubin, featuring full strings, chamber reeds, winds, and brass on various cuts. As a vocalist, Diamond's dramatic -- rather than involved -- authority is his trademark; he imposes it on almost every track. It works well here -- sometimes: the reading of Bill Withers'

"Ain't No Sunshine" is excellent for this reason, more like a playwright's look than a lover's. The fiddle in Lennon and McCartney's "Blackbird" adds warmth to Diamond's declamatory vocal. Randy Newman's "Feels Like Home" is a set high point: it so intimate, naked, and desperate -- uncharacteristic of the ultra-private Diamond -- it can stop the listener in her tracks; it feels unintentionally included on this collection. The restrained narrative storyteller's presentation of "Midnight Train to Georgia" is, despite its simple delivery, more empathic than passionate. The reading of Leonard Cohen's transcendent "Hallelujah" is not definitive by any means, but it best illustrates Diamond's intention to pay homage to the song -- it's an excellent version to add to the bunch that already exists. Lesley Duncan's "Love Song" (Elton John's reading on Tumbleweed Connection is the classic) is quietly yet exotically treated with layered acoustic guitars, a spare piano, and King Errisson's imaginative hand percussion. Harry Nilsson's "Don't Forget Me," which bookends the album, is another high point with a celebratory horn chart underscoring the romantic world-weary irony in Diamond's delivery. Some tracks just don't work. Gilbert O'Sullivan's "Alone Again (Naturally)" sounds like the maudlin, trite novelty it is. Diamond's "I'm a Believer" is rendered with far more drama than necessary. Here it's not an iconic pop song. It comes from the back end of the story -- illustrated by acoustic guitars, cello, and vibraphone, its joy is displaced by resolve, as if the singer is trying to convince himself the song's lyrics are true. Like most covers sets, this is a mixed bag, and it's for the hardcore Diamond fan more than those who admire Home Before Dark, 12 Songs, or his work from the '60s through the mid-'70s. ---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

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