

"You made me a shadowboxer, baby"

Nearly two years ago when Fiona recorded a three-song demo tape in Los Angeles she intended to mail everywhere to the far ends of the earth. She wanted to be a singer/songwriter, but she wasn't altogether sure how long the road would be. It turned out to be a short trip indeed. She went home to New York City for Christmas with a few copies of her demo in hand, one of which made its way into the hands of a prominent music industry executive by way of a friend with a fortuitous baby-sitting job. Andrew Slater, a holiday guest of the executive took one listen to the tape and set out to track down the voice and talent behind the compelling sounds. To his surprise, he traced the tape back to a timid 18-year-old with a rich voice and a narrative sense beyond her years.

On a pale September 29 evening in the New Orleans House of Blues, Fiona explained that she expected he was going to try to convince her to sell her songs to someone else to sing. She was prepared to put up a fight and state the strong case for performing her own stuff. Once again, opportunity fell into her lap.

Do you have an album's worth, he asked.

Um, sure, she replied. And let the white lie go at that.

In a creative flurry she composed *Tidal* from old songs and poems she had written and combined them with new pieces that seemed to come from nowhere. An ad hoc band was thrown together in the studio and out popped the album that has won her MTV's "Best New Artist" among other accolades.

"Is that why they call me a sullen girl?"

Though the fantastic opportunities at first came in waves, she soon found herself struggling on tour. The fourth time she was ever on stage, she found herself on TV. She was nervous and was unable to develop any relationship with audiences, the majority of which saw her as merely a mellow opening act.

The power of her words and the enrapturing melodies she persistently performed moved her from obscurity to stardom, opening act to headliner within a few short months. She fascinated the press, who scurried to sit down with her whenever they got the chance. At first she was open, open to the point one secret after another came pouring out. She became known as that girl who was raped. Every interview started to focus on how "screwed up she was." Her candid posture fed the sensationalistic leeches hunger for the next big headline and on a weekly basis she was portrayed in an increasingly negative light.

As a vegan, feminists argued Fiona was too underweight and represented a terrible role model for young girls. Her fans balked as her videos and publicity stills became increasingly sexual in nature. She has even admitted some people probably like her just because of her belly button. Rumors swirled that she was on drugs, that she attempted suicide, that she was burnt out and that she was through. None of which proved to be in any way substantiated.

The contrast of critical praise and popular rejection culminated in her acceptance speech for MTV's Best New Artist. After apologizing for not taking the moment to do the traditional thanks of friends, family and the fans, she embarked on a 30 second tirade, explaining she wished she had never entered "this world" and that teens at home should find more local and more real role models than herself or anyone else on TV.

A furor ensued about the selfish, ungrateful wretch who had the nerve to go on television and say she wished she had never been born. The point caught on with everyone from average people on the street to a Rolling Stone critic who lambasted her for her comments.

But then quietly the word spread about what she



FILE PHOTO

Fiona Apple has take the music scene by storm with her original style and compelling lyrics.

really meant. Surely and quite suddenly, her image has taken an about face.

"I don't understand it," she told the New Orleans crowd last week. "I was listening to the radio and I guess it was nice, but the D.J., she said, 'Yeah, we met Fiona and got to talk to her a little bit. And I hate to burst your bubble out there, but she wasn't a bitch.'" Fiona paused for a second to look out over the crowd. Her voice was scratchy from a cold she had been fighting, and with an innocent, honest tone she asked, "What did I do to deserve that?"

"But it's calm under the waves"

Back in February, the *Arcade* reviewed Fiona when she opened for Counting Crows. It was proclaimed that she had the potential to be a real deal and an artist who could endure. In this review, we're here to say now that she's proven to the rest of the world she's for real, soon enough she'll be taking another big step.

Through this turbulent 1997, one might be concerned that the energy and creative drive may run dry. So many artists hit that sophomore effort slump and soon wither and fade from the public eye. But rather than becoming slave to what has worked in the past, Fiona and her band (a group of musicians, none of whom played on the original *Tidal* recording) have reworked and enlivened old songs while slowly working new tunes into their repertoire. Lead guitarist Mickey Lockwood has added a new dimension to Fiona's sound and is clearly a large influence on the folk, almost gospel feel her musical direction seems to be taking. He has also added an improvisational element to their mid-song jams that free her to express what may after all be her greatest talent: getting the most out of her rich vocal quality.

To this writer's surprise, Fiona has the musical wherewithal to improvise and embellish vocal lines with

purpose making her melodies that much more interesting. She has the remarkable capacity to use her voice as another instrument, filling chords and running through compelling melodies, making her already powerful words that much more interesting to listen to.

As a standard encore, Fiona comes back on to the stage alone and sits at her baby grand. Without a word she starts into a crowd favorite, a piano solo ballad called "Never is a Promise." As usual, rooted in truth, it works on many levels. In her words she expresses the vulnerability and honesty that in some rouses a possibly empty desire within every listener to explain in no more elaborate words, "I understand."

*You'll never see the courage I know
Its colors' richness won't appear within your view
I'll never glow - the way that you glow
Your presence dominates the judgments made on you*

*But as the scenery grows, I see in different lights
The shades and shadows undulate in my perception
My feelings swell and stretch; I see from greater heights
I understand what I am still too proud to mention - to you*

*You'll say you understand, but you don't understand
You'll say you'd never give up seeing eye to eye
But never is a promise, and you can't afford to lie*

*You'll never touch - these things that I hold
The skin of my emotions lies beneath my own
You'll never feel the heat of this soul
My fever burns me deeper than I've ever shown - to you*

*You'll say, Don't fear your dreams, it's easier than it seems
You'll say you'd never let me fall from hopes so high
But never is a promise and you can't afford to lie*

*You'll never live the life that I live
I'll never live the life that wakes me in the night
You'll never hear the message I give
You'll say it looks as though I might give up this fight*

*But as the scenery grows, I see in different lights
The shades and shadows undulate in my perception
My feelings swell and stretch, I see from greater heights
I realize what I am now too smart to mention - to you*

*You'll say you understand, you'll never understand
I'll say I'll never wake up knowing how or why
I don't know what to believe in, you don't know who I am
You'll say I need appeasing when I start to cry
But never is a promise and I'll never need a lie*

"I'm building memories on things we have not said"

Fiona's break-neck speed concert tour has her scheduled solid through Nov. 1 and in all likelihood through the end of 1997. In recent interviews she has alluded to the fact that she deeply desires to get back in the studio. Her fans eagerly anticipate her new material, confident in the core talents and steady hands of a true artist.

She harbors the fury of the Alanises, but knows how to focus it.

She calls on the beautiful vocal quality of the Jewels, but knows how to keep it disciplined.

She understands music. She understands poetry. She understands performance.

If only one artist survives this late 90s female frontman surge, it will be Fiona Apple.

- Scott Alister McKinley, editor-in-chief