

ARTS Part

what's news in the arts

Robin Lane and Friends

It's not often one opens a CD and receives a whiff of something strong, maybe patchouli. It's an unusual introduction to Robin Lane's latest effort, *A Woman's Voice — Song To Us*. It's not exactly a Robin Lane CD, but one for which she supplied the tools and most of the playing for an intriguing group of songwriters. Lane, a successful Valley (and national) songwriter in her own right, leads songwriting/recording workshops at the Women's Resource Center in Turners Falls. The participants have suffered from an unpleasant list of issues, from trauma and addiction to mental health problems. Lane helps them discover what it means to write a song, and how self-expression can empower



COURTESY OF ROBIN LANE

them to deal with these issues. She hopes to both continue and spread this workshop phenomenon, and she'll lead another 16-week session starting in January.

These songs are products of a context that was clearly powerful for the participants, and it's got to be a difficult trick to convey the power of that context to those of us outside it, but this album's finest moments approach that. The songs are quite different in style and execution, and some of the songwriters are very strong performers — Rebecca Lane's "Viola Faye" features an emotionally charged vocal that's almost startling in its power, and other tracks reveal clever turns and unusual talents. Hard to go wrong with so much to choose from, and the cause is a good one. You can buy *Song To Us* at About Music in Greenfield, For the Record in Amherst, Dynamite Records in Northampton or on Robin Lane's web site.

— James Heflin