

# Colours

## TONI CHILD'S BRILLIANT CAREER SO FAR

Toni Childs' *Union* sings about innocence. Does she pursue naivety?

"I don't know if there's a pursuit of it ... it's a pursuit of honesty. There are a lot of checks and balances to that, being true to yourself."

Checks and Balances: one of those catchphrases on which America was founded, like Mom and Pie. Toni Childs' conversation is peppered with Americanisms, littered with hippie Me generation talk. That, initially, is a disappointment, because Childs' album *Union* is not a record you want to see tied down to any one place or time. Like the best of Eno, the best of Harold Budd, *Union* sings songs of distance and texture, of atmospheres and places far, far away. Fairytales. Whoops, getting a little emotional there ...

*Union* is a debut out of the blue. In a year when young musicians are retreating, recycling, reviving, rehashing old soul, old rock, *Union* takes a deep breath and moves forward.

Not without signposts, mind. Peter Gabriel's solo work is often cited as a

comparison (Childs calls him just "Gabriel", like the angel) — Childs tracks along the same pseudo-ethnic grooves, conscientious Third World rhythms, pussyfoots her way through layered production and choral harmonies. And there's a swag of Eno in *Union* too, he's a hero as well.

"Eno is someone who really inspired me, I think you can hear that on 'Where Is The Ocean.' I want to talk to Eno, hopefully I'll get the chance to meet him. His *Apollo* album. There's one piece of music on that, I would love to — and I would never normally ask this — I would love to put some words to it. The 'Ascension' theme. It is so beautiful. It just keeps repeating on the same theme, it is so beautiful. Everytime I hear it, my heart just goes. It's gorgeous."

Quite what Brian Peter George St John le Baptiste de la Salle Eno



would make of the enraptured Californian Childs remains to be seen; the wry analyst meets the earnest belligerent — the perfect checks and balances system.

Besides, Childs already has her muse. David Ricketts, of David' David, co-produced and co-wrote *Union* with Childs. A talented multi-instrumentalist, Ricketts introduced the singer to the studio where she embraced the sophistication of modern recording science with the fearless enthusiasm of a beginner. Do either of them follow Eno's studio technique?

"I do, to an extent — if it's taking us out of the norm, rather than to simply keep us ahead on the technical side. I like things that come from unusual places and sources. In this age the technology is coming on so quickly, so fast with all these keyboards and

There's someone at the door." Sure. I was getting a little emotional there.

Childs had worked with Ricketts before, on the soundtrack for *Echo Park*. The night after she signed her recording contract she went over to visit Ricketts. They were lovers for a year afterwards. *Union* took two and a half years to write and record, delayed when David' David's *Boomtown* took off in the States. Childs tried working with other people, but couldn't. When Ricketts was free to return to Childs' project, they decided to record in Africa, spurred on by little more than a hunch. That must have pleased an already impatient record company no end?

"It was a miracle that we went at all," Childs remembers. "When I told

"I've been around for a long time, writing and playing and really trying to go outside of myself. If I put out stuff earlier, I may never have evolved to this point."

synthesisers, that we have to go to new places to find new colours, new textures."

*Union's* state of the art craftsmanship is in marked contrast to the Luddite acoustic retreats of female artists like Tracy Chapman, with whom Childs has been hastily bracketed; instead, by using the studio, Childs has ranked herself alongside musicians like The Cocteau Twins. Does she listen to the Cocteau?

"Naaaaah," she purrs sarcastically. "Of course I do. Her voice, talk about heavenly! There's also this other group out on 4AD, this Bulgarian choir ... it's sooo beautiful. It's really special, really minimal. It's folk. Lovely..."

Are you proud of working with new musical forms?

"Yeah!"

Why? What makes them better?

"Um ... Can you hang on a second?"

the president of the company, wow. He asked me how the record was going, how I was enjoying myself, and I said, "I'm just so happy that I got to go to Africa, it meant so much to me." And he said, "You went where? What?" I guess it's kind of unusual to do that on your first album.

"The intention was to go to Africa ... so that allowed everything else to happen. I'd lived in England and had a lot of friends who are musicians living there, so when we stopped in London it became possible for them to be on the album. And I needed some more work from [guitarist] David Rhodes, who was touring with Gabriel in Paris. So everything found a place. But it all started with Africa."

Childs travelled to Swaziland and Zambia where she found and worked with two choirs, the Sibane Semaswati Singers and the New Generation. With Childs and Ricketts was David Tickle (Childs calls him



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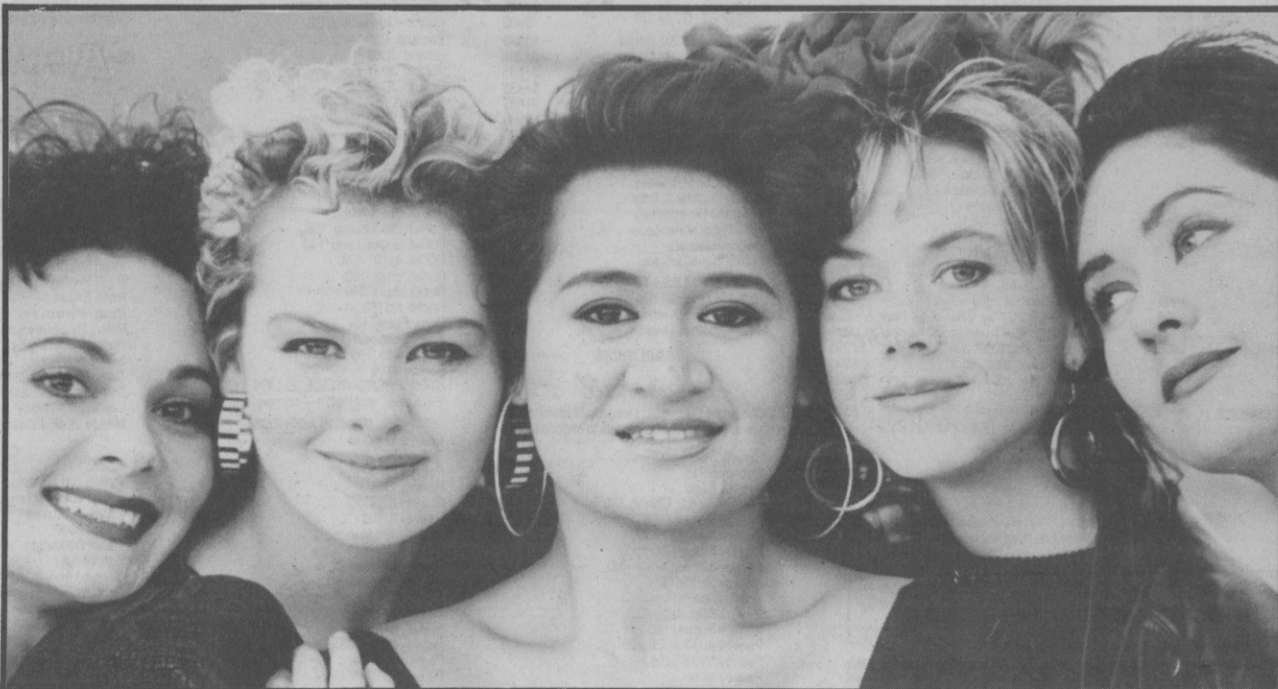
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