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A League of Her Own

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Friday, September 11, 2009

SERENA RYDER

"Is It O.K."

Kindred spirits: Melissa Etheridge, Stevie Nicks, Buffy Sainte-Marie

Show: Wednesday with NeedToBreathe and Green River Ordinance at the State Theatre. Show starts at 7 p.m. 703-237-0300. <http://www.thestatetheatre.org>.



Serena Ryder's latest effort is a lesson in originality and passion. (By Mary Rozzi)

Ever since Atlantic Records signed Serena Ryder, a 25-year-old Canadian singer-songwriter, it has been on a major media campaign to win her a U.S. breakthrough.

Ryder's debut for the label, "Is It O.K.," may well be the ticket.

It's easy to see why the second tune on the album, "Little Bit of Red," is gaining plenty of attention. Combine pop-rock percussion and guitar with Ryder's Stevie Nicks-meets-Bonnie Raitt vocals and you have a surefire hit.

Ryder's vocal range also charms on ballads "Brand New Love" and "All for Love."

But pretty voices backed by finely textured playing are abundant. What sets Ryder's songs apart are the emotionally charged, intelligent lyrics sung with the passion of a woman who knows the emotional intimacies about which she sings.

Consider "Weak in the Knees" in which Ryder, accompanied primarily by an acoustic guitar, sings of her despair when she finally admits a lover doesn't care.

Compare her to other artists if you must. What I hear is pure Serena Ryder, perhaps the freshest voice since Laurel Canyon's heyday.

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-- Nancy Dunham

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