

MARTI JONES TAKES ANOTHER CHANCE

LEN RIGHI, *The Morning Call* THE MORNING CALL October 11, 1986

For Marti Jones, the problem is not in having to depend on other people for songs to sing, but in choosing which ones she wants to do.

"A lot of people send in tapes of their material. They just come from everywhere," said the highly regarded stylist, who performed in Philadelphia this week. Her first album, "Unsophisticated Time," was one of 1985's unexpected surprises. (Rolling Stone magazine called it "... a solo debut of unexpected warmth and originality," while The Los Angeles Times said it was "... a remarkable piece of restrained rock, and an understandable labor of love for producer Don Dixon.")

A&M Records has just released Jones' second album, "Match Game," and on it, she puts her breathy, dusky voice, which bears a strong resemblance to Dusty Springfield's, to songs by the famous (David Bowie, Elvis Costello), the semi-famous (Dixon, Dwight Twilley, Marshall Crenshaw, Richard Barone) and the downright obscure (Reed Nielsen, John David). Twilley's spooky "Chance of a Lifetime" is the first single.

Is there something in particular she listens for when choosing songs? "Primarily I listen for the lyrics," she said. "The melody hits you right off the bat. The lyrics have to be something I believe in. I certainly don't wanna be cute, if you know what I mean."

For an aspiring pop stylist, the obvious role model is Linda Ronstadt, easily the most successful woman singer of the 1970s. Jones agrees. "One big thing with Linda Ronstadt, she had the most incredible song selection process that ever existed," she said.

"I hope there is a trend that will come about again, in keeping with the time (the early '60s) when all those girl groups were popular. They had people like Gerry Goffin and Carole King and Ellie Greenwich all writing songs for them. There are a lot of songwriters out there going unnoticed, and this would give these people a vehicle, an outlet."

Singing has been an outlet for Jones for her most of her life. She was born and raised in Akron, Ohio, which in the late '70s was a spawning ground for the likes of arty rock bands Devo, Pere Ubu, the Bizarros, and Tin Huey, as well as singers Jane Aire and Rachel Sweet. (Liam Sternberg, who wrote material for Aire and Sweet, contributed "Crusher," an excellent song with an "Ode to Billy Joe" strangeness, to "Match Game.")

Jones said she had "a basic, sound upbringing." Her father has his own piano-moving business, and both her parents "are happy people. They're fun, and funny. We've always been a musical family, though not professionally." Playing the guitar "is always something I've done. Both my (older) sisters play the (acoustic) guitar, too."

Jones attended Kent State University for five years, graduating in 1979 with an art degree. During that time she played first as a solo act, later with a bass player and then as part of a trio, with another guitarist. "I played the whole time I was in school, because it was easy money," Jones said.

After graduation, Jones continued to make money by playing her guitar and singing, but she still hadn't decided what she wanted to do with her life. Did she use try to use her art degree? "Not really, although I did some free-lance illustrations, signs and lettering."

In 1982 she became the singer in a foursome called Color Me Gone. The group recorded a self-titled EP, which was released in 1984 on A&M;, but soon broke up. "By then, I was pretty well burnt out on music. I didn't want to have

anything to do with it at all. I was thinking about going back to school. I wanted to learned to do medical illustrations."

But Jones got a postcard from producer Don Dixon (whose credits include R.E.M.). He had been impressed with Color Me Gone, and offered to work with Jones on a solo project. The result was "Unsophisticated Time."

" 'Unsophisticated Time' was a process of self-examination for me," Jones said. "Being a solo artist for the first time, it was hard for me to figure out what I sound like. During that time, I went with the flow. Now I have to make things happen, grab hold. I know who I am."