

eschewing the stardom she could have had, had she ever been willing to compromise) — for over thirty years all told, until her all-too-premature death from ovarian cancer in May of 1997 — five months short of her 50th birthday.

It was upon learning of her death that my interest was rekindled, and I upgraded her first two albums to CD format. *Eli and the Thirteenth Confession* (Columbia, 1968) and *More than Just a New Discovery* (Verve, 1966 — her first release, re-issued as *The First Songs* by Columbia in 1973) contain all the songs mentioned in the opening paragraph, plus a number of other incredible little three-minute gems — from the haunting, leanly soulful *Billy's Blues* and *Buy and Sell*, to the unknown pop classic *Lu* (whence the title of this article comes), to Laura's personal favorite, *Emily*, a tribute to her mother. There are so many fabulous tunes on these first two albums that I often wished for a “best of” release, so I could listen to them all without changing disks. It turns out that shortly before her death, *Stoned Soul Picnic: The Best of Laura Nyro* (Sony/Columbia, 1997 - above) was released. Laura herself had the final say on which tracks appeared on the collection. The only place I've ever seen this available is on the Web from CDNow ([www.cdnow.com](http://www.cdnow.com)) or Amazon ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)). It's a fabulous compilation that reveals the continually progressing emotional and technical maturity of her art.

This 25-year, 12-album retrospective includes her early works, two tunes from her third LP, *Gonna Take a Miracle* (a collaboration with Patti Labelle in her *Labelle* days), and a couple from each of nine others. It is in these nine others that I discovered something of a musical epiphany. Twenty years after writing her off, I was blown away anew by her prodigious talent. From 1969's *New York Tendaberry* (regarded by many critics as her finest work) comes the frenetic, yet pop-savvy *Captain St. Lucifer*. From 1970's *Christmas and the Beads of Sweat* there is *Blackpatch*, a three-minute masterpiece featuring Felix Cavaliere, which would have been at home on any Rascals album. There is the title track from *Smile*. From a 1977 live release, *Season of Lights*, is a slowed-tempo version of *Sweet Blindness*, as well as a live version of *Money*, which showcases both her piano and vocal skills. There are also songs from *Nested* (1978), *Mother's Spiritual* (1984), and five amazingly arranged, sung, played and produced songs from 1993's *Walk the Dog and Light the Light*, which was co-produced by Gary Katz of Steely Dan fame. The collection culminates with two live tracks (she was working on putting together another live album when she fell ill): a piano-and-vocal-only version of *And When I Die* (the first song she ever sold), and a harmony group medley of *Save the Country* and *Stoned Soul Picnic* that, like her life, was far too short.

While Laura Nyro is still alive in anyone who takes the time to get to know who she was and where her muse led her, her absence is still almost palpable. Her art cuts to the core. Her instrument was strong and sure. Her genius was a gift to us all.

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important groups, helping to establish Revelwood as an instantly recognizable name throughout the Known World.

Their introduction to Revelwood occurred when The General, then known as Eldorane de Edolo took an opportunity to smack Q square in the cahones with his favorite mace at a fighting demonstration. They were instant friends. As active members (Knight's Marshal and Chronicler) in The Shire of Iron Bog, they used the organizational skills they had learned to help create the Revelwood we know today.

Their replacements will have a strong Revelwood upon which to build for the next millennium .