

# dagger

## Sandy Denny: Under Review (Sexy Intellectual Production)

This one's kind of skimpy on the archival footage (often the filmmakers choose to craft impressionistic film collages for songs to compensate), but there is such a dearth of information around about Sandy Denny, easily one of the most mesmerizing singers of all time, that I consider this disc absolutely crucial. Fairport Convention vocalist Denny was a tragic folk heroine plagued by insecurity—she never felt comfortable as an artist in the spotlight, preferring to have a band she could lose herself in, (check out her song “Solo” for her lyrical take) — who was nonetheless blessed with a remarkably penetrating voice and superior songwriting talent. (She's the only “guest vocalist” to ever appear on a Led Zeppelin record, on the Middle-earthly “Battle of Evermore.”) The disc capably illuminates Denny as an artist worthy of rabid cult status, who died under sad circumstances (she fell down a flight of stairs, eventually sinking into a coma), but who was hugely influential on the English folk scene, revered by everyone who knew or played with her. Minor gripe: The commentary by former bandmate Dave Swarbrick is largely garbled, but it appears that this is the way he actually talks—what are you gonna do?

A cursory listen to Fairport's “What We Did On Our Holidays” or “Liege and Lief” should convince anyone with a pair of working ears that the emotionally fragile Denny, with her wounded angel's voice, was one in a zillion. Natch, the doc glosses over the more unsavory aspects of her character (she could be abusive and her drinking probably contributed to her tumble), but no matter. This entry covers her entire turbulent career, and as such deserves nothing less than total absorption.

(John Chandler)