

REVIEWS

NEIL DIAMOND

*Dreams*

[Columbia]

Neil Diamond has made a remarkable resurgence as a songwriter during the past decade, but this album of covers finds him paying tribute to material that helped shape that songwriting brilliance in the first place. Diamond instills these classic tunes from the '60s and '70s with an after-hours ambiance that spotlights their melodic strength and lyrical power. High points include an Americana-tinged take on the Beatles' "Blackbird," replete with splashes of hoedown fiddle, and a stately version of the Eagles' "Desperado" powered by little more than a soft-strummed acoustic guitar and a muted bass line. Vocally, Diamond has never sounded better, as he reels in the melodrama that's occasionally marred his previous work and instead opts for a more subtle approach. *Dreams* isn't perfect—Diamond's lounge-y take on Gilbert O'Sullivan's "Alone Again (Naturally)" falls flat—but for the most part he inhabits these songs as if he was born to sing them. —Russell Hall

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