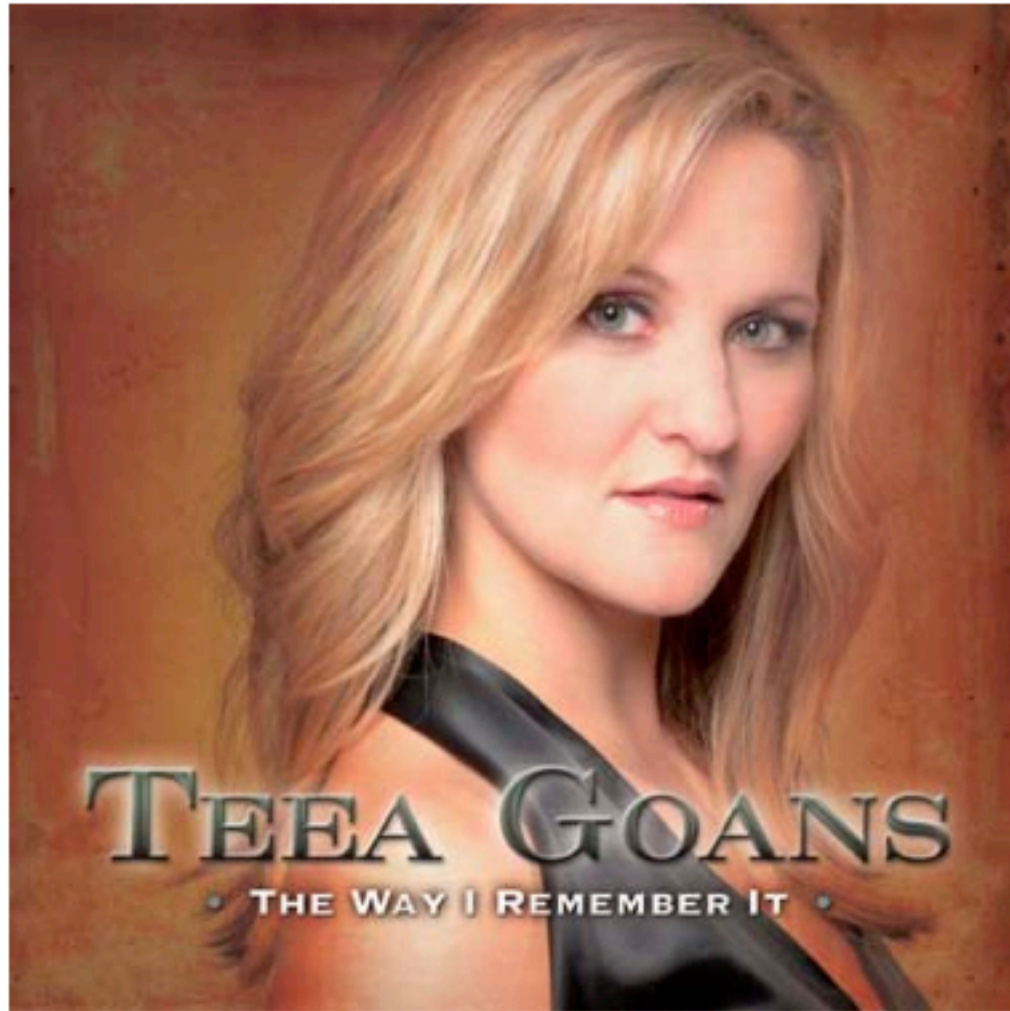




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Tea Goans The Way I Remember It

★★★★½

In today's pop-goes-the-country climate, it's easy to forget that traditional country doesn't have to sound like an oldfangled twangfest. Tea Goans debut, *The Way I Remember It*, reminds us that country can be simple yet sophisticated and, sometimes, sublime. A newcomer who's already wowed Opry crowds, she tackles titles by the likes of Bill Anderson and Merle Haggard with skill and grace, resulting in a sound one might peg as "champagne honky-tonk." Thanks to producers Terry Choate and Joe Spivey, the album deftly balances class and classic country in a manner that evokes whiffs of Patsy Cline and Barbara Mandrell. If the album's predominance of midtempo numbers can challenge a short attention span, all is forgiven by the time you reach the closer, "Letter From God." This stirring, uplifting track would be a smash delivered in Carrie Underwood's arena-aimed acrobatics, but anyone who appreciates a finely nuanced vocal performance can thank heavens Tea Goans got to it first.

--STEVE MORLEY