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2 } Joanna Newsom

Ys
(Drag City)

The best-known singer-songwriter-harpist on the indie circuit, Joanna Newsom makes it clear on her second album that she's not resting on the laurels from her celebrated debut. *Ys*, a collection of five epic, fairy tale–like songs (one nearly 17 minutes long), is a thoroughly ambitious effort, harnessed by Newsom's meanderingly squeaky voice. Accompanied by spastic and quirky arrangements by Van Dyke Parks (*Smile*), Newsom's highly literary songs ebb and flow with a structure and complexity that would befit the score for a Tolkien trilogy. What it lacks in immediate charm—when compared with her first release, *Milk-Eyed Mender*—*Ys* compensates for in scale and eloquence. —SH