

USA TODAY

Martina McBride, *Timeless* (* * * ½) McBride is the standard against which all other female country singers are measured these days. By turning the clock back with this collection of country standards, McBride measures herself against great voices ranging from Hank Williams to Ray Charles. McBride often seems to be re-creating records more than reinterpreting songs, but her tastes are just unpredictable enough to keep things interesting. Seventies crossover hits such as *Rose Garden* and *Satin Sheets* aren't much of a stretch, but who would have guessed Nashville's power-ballad queen harbored a fondness for honky-tonk shuffles such as Charlie Walker's *Pick Me Up on Your Way Down* and Ernest Tubb's *Thanks a Lot*? Or that she'd remake two Sammi Smith hits (*Help Me Make It Through the Night* and *Today I Started Loving You Again*) but nothing from Dolly Parton or Patsy Cline? Singing songs with this much history is always a challenge, one that McBride rises to, educating and, more important, enjoying herself in the process. —
Brian Mansfield