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Catherine Russell Can "Bring It Back" (2014, Jazz Village)

Thursday, 27 March 2014

Written by Andrea Canter, Contributing Editor
Tuesday, 25 February 2014



Bring It Back

Jazz/blues singer Catherine Russell was a mere 50 years old when she released her debut solo album, but she was hardly a newcomer. Daughter of the late Luis Russell-- longtime music director for Louis Armstrong-- and the late Cantine Ray--bassist, guitarist, vocalist and alum of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, Russell was immersed in jazz and blues from earliest childhood. Yet until she released *Cat* in 2006, Catherine was largely known as the backup singer for David Bowie, Steely Dan, Cyndi Lauper, Jackson Browne, Michael Feinstein, Paul Simon, Rosanne Cash and more. Five albums later, Russell has found a new audience and a "new" career direction as one of the finest interpreters of classic songs, particularly from the 30s and 40s, the era for which her parents were most known. Accolades from Will Friedwald and Nat Hentoff, chart-toppers and award winners *Sentimental Streak* (2008), *Inside This Heart* (2010) and *Strictly Romantic* (2012), and a Grammy Award as featured artist on the HBO soundtrack for the television series *Boardwalk Empire* filled the past eight years, paving the way for her 2014 release, *Bring It Back*, focusing on the Luis Russell/Louis Armstrong collaborations interpreted with the support of a ten-piece orchestra. Jazz Age gems co-exist in stunning fashion with material associated with blues icons Esther Phillips Al Hibbler, Wynonie Harris and Little Willie John. On the one hand, the songs have the sound of an early 20th-century orchestra; on the other hand, Russell brings to each work not only a reverence for the past masters, but a modern energy and sense of discovery. It's an unbeatable combination of swing, blues, and storytelling.



Catherine Russell © Andrea Canter

Russell opens with the swinging blues title track which also features some finger-flying guitar from Matt Munisteri. Written by the "Uncrowned Queen of the Blues" Ida Cox, "You Got to Swing and Sway" features Jon-Erik Kello's muted trumpet and arrangement and Russell keeping pace with that "red hot rhythm" Catherine and the band scorch with more hot blues on "I'm Sticking to You Baby," maybe the most searing version since Little Willie John's. Perhaps the track that best shows off Russell's ability to tell a sultry blue tale while seductively swinging all the way is Johnny Otis' "Aged and Mellow" -- you'll be torn between dancing and simply listening to Catherine and her perfect-fit band, featuring Mark Shane's piano and Russell's horn arrangements. "After the Lights Go Down Low" was a hit for Al Hibbler in the 50s and later covered by Marvin Gaye and Lou Rawls. Add Catherine Russell to the list of the song's most soulful interpreters.

Of the jazzy swingers, "I'm Shooting High" (Koehler and McHugh) was a hit for Louis Armstrong, Nat King

Cole, and Ann Richards; now it should be a hit for Catherine Russell-- who surely is "shooting high" throughout the recording. The oldest--and arguably most swinging-- tune of the set, Shelton Brooks' "Darktown Strutter's Ball" was written in 1917 and recorded by many, from the Original Dixieland Jazz Band to Chick Webb, Jimmy Dorsey, Fats Waller and Alberta Hunter. And now, Catherine Russell, with Matt Munisteri's arrangement, Glenn Patscha's B-3 and some swinging deep bass from Nicki Parrott. "You've Got Me Under Your Thumb" swings hard as well, again featuring the guitar and arranging of Munisteri (guitar and voice--a duo for the future?). Harold Arlen's "Public Melody Number One" is sheer delight-- we should hear this more often.

Ellington's "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart," like much of the album, conjures a big band on the dance floor, Russell's clean diction, slow swing, and sincere plea "to make amends" simply elegant. Fats Waller and Andy Ratzliff wrote

Twin Cities Live Jazz Calendar



New and Notable

Keith Jarrett / Gary Peacock / Jack DeJohnette, *Somewhere* (2013, ECM)

Written by Andrea Canter, Contributing Editor



I didn't get a chance to listen to *Somewhere* until well after its release. Now I can't stop

listening. It's telling that the latest album from what has been commonly dubbed the Keith Jarrett Standards Trio was released under the three names, highlighting the nature of the thirty years' collaboration among three of the most singular talents in jazz. *Somewhere* marks the trio's first release since recording material in 2001 that found its way onto three albums released between 2004-2009. And at that, the "new" release was recorded in 2009, live at the KKL Luzern Concert Hall in Switzerland. But it was definitely worth the wait as *Somewhere* proves the trio's lack of recent discography reflects no loss of empathy or ingenuity as they cover familiar standards from Miles Davis and Harold Arlen and a pair from *West Side Story*, as well as two from Jarrett himself.

An intertwining of Jarrett's "Deep Space" with Miles' "Solar" starts with Jarrett's solo explorations, hollow-toned sonic crystals à la Marilyn Crispell, the trio sliding delicately into "Solar" as if the intro belonged there all along. Jarrett's right hand and left hand seem to come from different minds before the trio adds a measure of swing, Peacock adding a large helping of propulsive basslines, DeJohnette taking rhythm for a ride. Jarrett has never been more dazzling. "Stars Fell on Alabama" is simply luxurious, Jarrett elegant, Peacock complimenting every note. There's traces of Monk (especially "I Mean You") throughout the trio's playful arrangement of Arlen's "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea," as each musician inserts his own quirky rhythmic alterations. (And was that really a snippet of the *Andy Griffith Show* theme song?)

The two Leonard Bernstein tracks give the Trio their centrifugal force, with "Somewhere" (and Jarrett's addendum "Everywhere") stretching out to nearly 20 minutes of exquisite interplay.

"Strange as it Seems" in 1952 although it sways as if from a decade earlier, and given Russell's sweet rendition over Mark Shane's rag piano, the song should get more play. A sentimental favorite track here is Luis Russell's gently prancing "Lucille," written in honor of Armstrong's wife but only recently discovered, and first recorded by Catherine's mother, Carlaine Ray, shortly before her death in 2013.

Despite the legacy and mid-era swing of "I Cover the Waterfront," Russell manages to inject a bit of a more modern edge, just enough to remind us of the timelessness of the lyric; bassist Lee Hudson proves to be a tasteful collaborator, while tenorman Andy Farber adds a solo that mirrors Russell's cross-generation appeal. It's a winning closing track on a winning album that proves some songs will never go out of our hearts—not as long as the likes of Catherine Russell carry the torch so well.

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There's so much going on worthy of comment, from Jarrett's circuitous but upwardly mobile blues to DeJohnette's a-fib heartbeats to the slowing pulse of the coda. "Tonight" is far more upbeat, even swinging, Jarrett joyriding over the highway driving of bass and drums. The Van Heusen/Mercer chestnut, "I Thought About You," closes the set, showcasing the improvisational talents of the Trio, Jarrett throwing in a side of Gershwin along the way to a sumptuous finish.

Prone to tantrums and meltdowns in live performance, Keith Jarrett still remains arguably the artist best suited to the spontaneity of live interaction, and the trio of Jarrett, Peacock and DeJohnette the epitome of collaborative improvisation. And *Somewhere* should be heard "Everywhere."

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Dave Douglas Quintet Moves Back and Forth in "Time Travel" (2013, Greenleaf Music)

Written by Andrea Canter, Contributing Editor



In 2013, Dave Douglas went 50/40/20: The prolific composer and

bandleader turned 50 and released his fortieth album as a leader over the past 20 years. And with his current quintet (saxophonist Jon Irabagon, pianist Matt Mitchell, bassist Linda Oh and drummer Rudy Royston), Douglas seems to have found a way to pull together his full multi-band, multi-sonic musical resumé. Sort of a follow-up to 2012's *Be Still* (same band sans vocalist, more hardcore modern jazz sounds), Douglas wanted "to find something that's in-between soloing and trading and playing together." Over the seven new Douglas compositions, he found something that, rather than "in-between" the group and individual, is a collaborative family where the individual serves the whole, the whole serves the individual. And it all serves the listener extremely well, with echoes of Mingus, Monk, Ellington and even Maria Schneider.

As she does throughout, Linda Oh sets a dramatic pulse on the opening "Bridge to Nowhere," the harmonic dialogue among sax and trumpet playfully dissonant as the music takes off in quirky directions. Oh and Royston make a formidable team keeping it together while also willing to push it to the edge. Mitchell and Irabagon bring a Monk factor into sharp focus in their solos. The horns darkly introduce the more delicate title track -- perhaps this is a Sci Fi time machine? Bass and drums keep the band lurching forward on a trip that crosses alternately rugged and neatly terraced terrain as well as time. The topography--shallow pools and deep crevices--is particularly cultivated by Royston's daring imagination. "The Law of Historic Memory" is a more regal ensemble trip, Oh and Mitchell seeming to direct from darkness toward a slowly revealing light, the horns more controlled, seeking a companionship in

melody and harmony that is ultimately uplifting.

"Beware of Doug" provides a feisty, tumbling dose of New Orleans as if Mingus was directing a high-wire act. It's a raucous romp for Douglas and Royston, while Irabagon and Mitchell do their own bit of time traveling before Oh launches as exciting and essential a solo as any on the album. Or so it seems until she again takes charge with a bouncy monologue on the aggressive nod to Dave's home in the "Garden State." Spare piano, dark bass and tingling cymbals set up a nursery-rhythmish pairing for the horns on "Little Feet," augmented by Mitchell's solo spin. The majestic horn harmonies elevate "The Pigeon and the Pie," Irabagon and Mitchell offering perhaps the most elegant solo passages of the set. If Maria Schneider wrote for small ensembles, she might encounter this track along her journey. *Time Travel* can move back or ahead, and the Dave Douglas Quintet manages to balance their direction without losing a second of motion.

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