Nina Simone - The Jazz Plays Nina Simone (2008)



1. I Put A Spell On You 2. Feeling Good 3. Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out 4. Strange Fruit 5. Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood 6. Ain't Got No… I Got Life 7. Mood Indigo 8. My Baby Just Cares For Me (Live At Vine St. Bar & Grill 1987) 9. Break Down And Let It All Out 10. Black Is The Color Of My True Love's Hair Live (New York 1964) 11. Don't You Pay Them No Mind 12. See Line Woman 13. Four Women 14. Work Song 15. Ne Me Quitte Pas 16. I Loves You Porgy (Live In New York 1964) 17. Sinnerman 18. Don't Smoke In Bed (Live In New York 1964) 19. The Gal From Joe's 20. Mr Bojangles 21. Don't Explain

The company that owns the digital radio station "theJazz" has announced that the station is closing down at the end of March, barely more than a year since it opened. So it is hardly a propitious time to release an album with this title. Perhaps the CD should have been called theJazz Doesn't Play Nina Simone.

Nevertheless, this is a good representative selection from the work of a singing pianist who always seemed to be outside the jazz mainstream. She is not even mentioned in some jazz reference books, perhaps for the snobbish reason that some of her singles got into the pop charts and have even been used in TV commercials (but so have those of Louis Armstrong - the subject of theJazz's previous release). Certainly Simone was the kind of artist who appeals to people who don't normally regard themselves as jazz fans. This album includes such popular hits as I Put a Spell on You and My Baby Just Cares For me but unaccountably omits To Love Somebody, which got into the UK Top Five in 1969.

However popular she was, and despite her classical training, she was undoubtedly a jazz performer - and a unique one. Her voice was deep and she often used a very wide vibrato, putting songs across with a passion which also found voice in her political activism. But this

passion gave a forcefulness to many of her performances: whether an optimistic song like Feeling Good or the sombre Strange Fruit (here performed very histrionically). Her piano style was often thumping - even ponderous - a quality she shared with Dave Brubeck (another classically-influenced pianist). And she took material from whatever sources she pleased - popular songs, show tunes, folk and gospel songs, as well as jazz standards and her own originals. Who else would take the Ellington tune Mood Indigo as she does on this CD - as a fast swing number? She was not always the subtlest of performers, although a track like Black is the Colour of My True Love's Hair shows that she could be tender and restrained.

Nina left the USA in 1974 and eventually settled in the south of France, where she died in 2003. However you categorize her, she certainly left her mark on music. ---Tony Augarde, musicweb-international.com

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