

Sara Gazarek - Blossom & Bee (2012)

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Saturday, 23 November 2013 16:38 -

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1. Everything I've Got 2. Blossom & Bee 3. Fly Away Birdie 4. The Luckiest 5. Down With Love 6. Lucky To Be Me 7. Tea For Two 8. I'm Old Fashioned 9. So This Is Love 10. The Lies Of Handsome Men 11. Some Of These Days 12. Unpack Your Adjectives. Sara Gazarek - vocals Josh Nelson – piano Hamilton Price – bass Zach Harmon – drums John Pizzarelli - vocals, guitar Larry Goldings - piano, melodica, organ

All chicken or feathers, feast or famine, flood or drought; regarding jazz vocal releases, there is always a healthy steady stream of new music being produced. The vast majority is good while, as it should be, the truly exceptional are of a rarer variety. The release of Kate McGarry's exceptional *Girl Talk* (Palmetto, 2012) might have been just a singular event of excellence, except that Sara Gazarek decided to join McGarry at Palmetto records, releasing the equally fine *Blossom & Bee*, signaling a trend of excellence in jazz vocals released over a compressed event horizon.

Vocalist Gazarek has already had a banner year, considering her collaboration with Triosence on *Where Time Stands Still* (Charleston Square, 2012). Add to this her Palmetto recording and the singer might be found attaining artistic cruising altitude. Gazarek considers herself an "interpreter" or "song stylist," not unlike Frank Sinatra or Tony Bennett, as opposed to a vocal gymnast capable of scat or vocalese fireworks. Her interpretive ability is true and her style is a perfect updating of what the song stylist does.

Gazarek ensures her comfort zone with the presence of her Los Angeles- based trio: pianist Josh Nelson, bassist Hamilton Price and drummer Zach Harmon. She is also joined and supported by producer Larry Goldings, who provides organ, piano and melodica support, and an appearance by guitarist vocalist John Pizzarelli, who capably duets with Gazarek on her own "Blossom & Bee," singing sweetly and providing that 1930s guitar sound to the retro-related

piece. The sum of this band is that it facilitates Garzarek's global creative vision in delightfully unexpected ways.

Garzarek's confident voice and sure ear enable her to capably sing across genre and periods. The opening "Everything I've Got" sounds every bit Rodgers and Hart updated with a very smart and shiny contemporary arrangement. This is very much old wine poured into a new wineskin with all of the show tune charm with tasteful instrumental updating. The Gazarek-Nelson original "Fly Away Birdie" is softly gospel-R&B, with Nelson playing electric piano in solution with Golding's soulful organ. Again, an inventive coupling of the old and new.

A thoroughly contemporary and appropriately performed "The Luckiest" is a Ben Folds composition close to Gazarek, having had a place at her wedding. "Lucky to be Me" is given a power-ballad reading, with drummer Harmon providing expansive percussion that sweeps the song along. Old standbys "Tea for Two" and "I'm Old Fashioned" follow Gazarek's already established formula of genius modern interpretation that does not go so far as to ruin the material. Her progressively conservative spirit is what broadens the center of her interpretations. Her closing with Schoolhouse Rock's "Unpack Your Adjectives" shows that no material is off limits to this talent singer, who is sure to keep delighting with the highest quality. ---C. Michael Bailey, allaboutjazz.com

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