

Lauren Kinhan □ – A Sleepin' Bee (2017)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Let's Live Again* 4:28 2 *Guess Who I Saw Today* 5:07 3 *A Sleepin' Bee* 4:32 4 *(You Don't Know) How Glad I Am* 3:24 5 *Never Will I Marry* 4:49 6 *Save Your Love For Me* 6:14 7 *The Old Country/Passion Flower* 9:04 8 *Born To Be Blue* 4:13 9 *You Don't Know What Love Is* 5:01 10 *Happy Talk* 3:31
Lauren Kinhan - vocals Andy Ezrin - piano Matt Penman - bass Jared Schonig - drums Ingrid Jensen - trumpet

Leaning on touchstones as a creative resource can be tricky business. If an artist puts too much stock in the original, they end up with a second-rate likeness of the archetype. But if they move too far away from the model, the tether breaks and the connection is completely lost in the wind. It takes a shrewd conceptualist to find the right balance between bowing and breaking free, and vocalist Lauren Kinhan most definitely fits the bill.

With *A Sleepin' Bee*, Kinhan salutes the great Nancy Wilson without stepping into her shoes. Material from Wilson's classic collaboration with Cannonball Adderley (and a handful of other albums) is saluted and remodeled as Kinhan invests each song with her own creative perspective. It's a work rich with invention and focused intentions, neither fitting nor breaking a mold, but rather, reshaping one.

"Let's Live Again" launches the album, mixing easy swing with some hot-blooded notions while also giving pianist Andy Ezrin room to shine. Then Kinhan dissects and updates "Guess Who I Saw Today" in stunning fashion, playing the role of perspicacious chronicler without falling prey to the past and its expectations. The title track, the first of several numbers plucked from the playlist of the immortal Nancy Wilson/Cannonball Adderley (Capitol Records, 1961), opens on Jared Schonig's lightly dancing brushes before opening up into a tight swinger with hits aplenty from the band. Further explorations into that Iodestar recording yield a hip and grooving "Never Will I Marry," featuring some fluid solo work from trumpeter Ingrid Jensen and showcasing a

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pointed hookup between Schonig and bassist Matt Penman; a "Save Your Love From Me" that distills the essence of the song, pulling every drop of beauty from each floating word, note, and chord; a trip through "The Old Country" that uses Penman's bass as a framing device and segues into "Passion Flower"; and a "Happy Talk" that moves from a drunken state to a solidly swinging environment while putting Jensen's muted horn in the spotlight. This is Kinhan's show in every respect, but she proves eager and willing to share the attention with her band.

Every single song in this collection hits a sweet spot of a different sort, but the most pleasing aspect of the recording is how it uncovers the stripped-down, soulful side of Kinhan's voice. Intentional or not, that's an aspect of her artistry that's been obscured on past productions. But with the raw emotionality of "(You Don't Know) How Glad I Am" now held up as the prime example, it's something that's impossible to forget about it. Add to that some other known and unknown aspects of her work—brilliance in interpreting ballads, off-the-cuff maneuvers in bluesy and bawdy environments, whip-smart interactions with the instrumentalists—and you end up with a complete picture of her talents and the manners in which she claims these songs as her own.

On the surface Kinhan may not appear to be ideally suited for a Wilson tribute. The two vocalists aren't matched in terms of timbre and tactics. But both of these women have a knack for ducking labels—Wilson's been claimed by jazz fans, R&B aficionados, and blues lovers alike, and Kinhan, best known for her work with the artistically broad-minded New York Voices, comes across as a sophisticated, pop-influenced singer-songwriter on her previous solo dates. Each possess chameleonic abilities in the way they present, so therein lies the great connection(s) between the two, cemented for all to hear on A Sleepin' Bee. ---Dan Bilawsky, allaboutjazz.com

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