

Roberta Donnay & The Prohibition Mob Band - A Little Sugar (2012)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Oh Papa* 02. *You Got to Swing and Sway* 03. *Mama's Gone, Goodbye* 04. *Say It Isn't So* 05. *I've Got a Feeling I'm Falling* 06. *One Monkey Don't Stop No Show* 07. *Rocking Chair* 08. *(Tropical) Heatwave* 09. *You Go to My Head* 10. *Sugar Blues* 11. *You've Been a Good Ole Wagon* 12. *(I Want a Little) Sugar in My Bowl* 13. *Empty Bed Blues* Roberta Donnay - Vocals Rich Armstrong - Cornet, Trumpet Michael Barsimanto - Drums Sam Bevan - Bass Sheldon Brown - Clarinet, Flute, Saxophone John R. Burr - Piano Ed Ivey - Tuba Wayne Wallace - Trombone

Among veteran songstress Roberta Donnay's career accomplishments is having her song "One World" selected as a world peace anthem for the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations; it was also the theme for World Aids Day in South Africa. On her delightfully jazzy, sassy, and colorful follow-up to 2008's jazz standards project *What's Your Story*, the multi-talented singer aims to achieve global unity in a different way: by pouring *A Little Sugar* on our differences, taking us back some 80 or 90 years and exploring a time of musical Renaissance that can still tug the heartstrings. In exploring the world of Prohibition-*proto-jazz*, many singers possessing her charming blend of girlishness and saucy conviction could go the easy route and sing some of the Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Hoagy Carmichael faves we all know. But there's nary a Gershwin tune to be found, and her two jaunts into Berlin's catalog (the elegant and wistful trio piece "Say It Isn't So," the playful Latin romp "(Tropical) Heatwave," and the single dip into the Carmichael canon (a graceful, swaying "Rocking Chair") take her off the beaten path and into the deeper artistry of those composers and their era. Many of Donnay's song choices reflect her love of strong, outspoken female composers and artists whose songs were practically forerunners of the later women's lib movement. Opening with the swinging and sultry, brass-fired "Oh Papa" accomplishes this in two ways, because the song was originally recorded by "Mother of the Blues" Ma Rainey and later under a different title by Bessie Smith. Likewise, the brisk and lively "You Got to Swing and Sway" -- a song that's so danceable one wonders why it is still so obscure -- which was penned by blues singer Ida Cox in the late '30s when she was making a comeback. The stride/Dixieland-influenced "Mama's Gone Goodbye," originally recorded in 1923, invokes another name largely lost to history but which bears some research: Sippie Wallace. Donnay's big-band arrangement of "Sugar Blues" owes more to Ella

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Fitzgerald's later recording than any that appeared when it was penned in 1920. Perhaps the epitome of the Great American Songbook -- and often recorded by popular artists -- "You Go to My Head" is given a tender, sparse jazz arrangement. Donnay's voice could make any classic material sound wondrous and timeless, but the fact that she digs so deep into American musical history -- and works with some of the Bay Area's top jazz musicians (under the guise of the Prohibition Mob Band) -- makes A Little Sugar not only sweet, but a recording that will stand the test of time. ---Jonathan Widran, Rovi

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