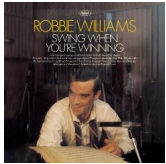


Robbie Williams - Swing When You're Winning (2001)

Written by bluelover

Tuesday, 13 October 2009 20:48 - Last Updated Wednesday, 14 June 2017 16:06

Robbie Williams - Swing When You're Winning (2001)



1. *I will talk and hollywood will listen* 2. *Mack the knife* 3. *Somethin' stupid* (Robbie Williams & Nicole Kidman) 4. *Do nothin'till you hear from me* 5. *It was a very good year* (Robbie Williams & Frank Sinatra) 6. *Straighten up and fly right* 7. *Well, did you evah* (Robbie Williams & Jon Lovitz) 8. *Mr. Bojangles* 9. *One for my baby* 10. *Things* (Robbie Williams & Jane Horrocks) 11. *Ain't that a kick in the head* 12. *They can't take that away from me* (Robbie Williams & Rupert Everett) 13. *Have you met miss Jones?* 14. *Me and my shadow* (Robbie Williams & Jonathan Wilkes) 15. *Beyond the sea*

Performance dynamo and chameleonic entertainment personality Robbie Williams made a rapid transformation -- from English football hooligan to dapper saloon singer -- for his fourth LP, *Swing When You're Winning*. Still, Williams' tribute to the great American songbook is a surprisingly natural fit with its intended target: '50s trad-pop patriarchs like Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. And just like those two loveable rogues, Williams has brawled and boozed in the past, but isn't afraid to wear his heart on his sleeve; in fact, he's one of the few modern pop stars to fully embrace affecting balladry and nuanced singing. Williams and longtime producer Guy Chambers are also extremely careful with their product, so it shouldn't be surprising that *Swing When You're Winning* has innumerable extra-musical touches to carry it over: the cover features Williams relaxing in the studio in a period suit; his contract with EMI enabled the addition of the treasured Capitol logo at the top of the sleeve, and several tracks were even recorded at the famed Capitol tower in Hollywood.

Fortunately, Williams is no less careful with his performances. Since he lacks the authoritative air of master crooners like Sinatra and Bing Crosby (along with the rest of humanity), he instead plays up his closer connections to the world of Broadway. His readings are dynamic and emotional -- sometimes a consequence of trying to put a new spin on these classics (six of the covers are Sinatra standards, three are Bobby Darin's). He also invited, with nearly universal success, a series of duet partners: Nicole Kidman for the sublime "Somethin' Stupid," Jon Lovitz for the irresistibly catty "Well, Did You Evah," Rupert Everett for "They Can't Take That Away

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From Me," longtime Sinatra accompanist Bill Miller on "One for My Baby," even Sinatra himself for a version of "It Was a Very Good Year" on which Williams takes the first two verses (over the 1965 arrangement), then bows out as Sinatra's original counsels him concerning the later stages of life. Though it may be an overly close tribute to a familiar original (like many of the songs here), Williams' considerable skills with expression and interpretation largely overwhelm any close criticism. He's definitely much better on the comedy songs, especially the hilarious "Well, Did You Evah" (originally a duet for Crosby and Sinatra in the 1956 film High Society). Lovitz's rounded tones and faux-affected airs are a spot-on interpretation of Brother Cros, while Williams' emulation of a boorish lug ("That's a nice dress -- think I could talk her out of it?") is nearly perfect as well. Though arranger Steve Sidwell hasn't done many charts (and those for the movies Moulin Rouge, Bridget Jones' Diary, and Romeo + Juliet), he also acquits himself nicely aping classic scores for "One for My Baby" and "Beyond the Sea." The lone Robbie Williams original is "I Will Talk and Hollywood Will Listen," a sweeping pipe-dream fantasy of true American superstardom for Britain's biggest pop star. It could happen, too; Pierce Brosnan surely isn't growing any younger. ---John Bush, AllMusic Review

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