Catherine Russell - Strictly Romancin' (2012)

1. Under the Spell of the Blues 2. I'm in the Mood for Love 3. Wake up and Live 4. Ev'ntide 5. Romance in the Dark 6. I'm Checkin' Out, Goom'bye 7. No More 8. Satchel Mouth Baby 9. Everything's Been Done Before 10. Don't Leave Me 11. I Haven't Changed a Thing 12. Everybody Loves My Baby 13. He's All I Need 14. Whatcha Gonna Do When There Ain't No Swing? Personnel: Catherine Russell (vocals) Matt Munisteri (guitar) Dan Block (clarinet, alto saxophone) Andy Farber (tenor saxophone) Jon-Erik Kellso (trumpet) John Allred (trombone) Mark Shane (piano) Mark McLean (drums)

Catherine Russell is a throwback vocalist, old school. Russell is a captivating story teller when it comes to all things love. Strictly Romancin' is an extension of Inside This Heart of Mine but with a slightly more organic twist. While Russell can never be accused of the same kind of self indulgent pretentiousness found in some vocal artists today, here Russell goes the opposite direction. Musical diversity, an eclectic journey of tales of primal nature of love to that of the more esoterically oriented. Catherine Russell seems to have mastered the transition from vocalist to story teller with relative ease and this natural if not infectious self assurance is immediately transferred to the audience in a form of sonic chemistry that is literally undeniable. Naturally with taste subjective then ten different people may walk away with ten different takes on the same song become the natural communicative style in which Russell works her craft is a virtual lock to mentioned more than a half dozen times.

The ability to shift dynamics on the fly is what can make a good singer a great vocalist, become a master and you turn into a vocal story teller with an almost innate ability to transform an individual to a different time and a different place. This skill is a rare gift that I personally do not believe can be taught. "Under The Spell Of The Blues" with an elegant swing and an earnest delivery from Russell there is a subtle yet smokey swing with the remembrance of a time gone by in chronological years but not in musical honesty and this is where Russell shines brightest. Nothing is forced. While the average "jazz diva" should be working with the yellow triangle next to them that states: "Danger - Pretentious Artist At Work" - Russell makes old school new cool!

The iconic standard "I'm In The Mood For Love" is carried off with an old school subtlety but is silky smooth with just the hint of a smokey finish to go down satisfying! "Don't Leave Me" has a slight blues infusion while not over bearing there is room for even more but nothing can derail what is a virtually flawlessly paced release.

Strictly Romancin is a virtually flawless release from concept to the last note, as entertaining a release as you may hear from the vocal side of the jazz idiom all year. Catherine Russell is far more than a singer, she is an entertainer with a first call lineup surrounding her to simply take a good thing and make it better. --- criticaljazz.com

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