

Jamie Cullum - Catching Tales (2005)

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1. *Get Your Way*
2. *London Skies*
3. *Photograph*
4. *I Only Have Eyes for You*
5. *Nothing I Do*
6. *Mind Trick*
7. *21st Century Kid*
8. *I'm Glad There Is You*
9. *Oh God*
10. *Catch the Sun*
11. *7 Days to Change Your Life*
12. *Our Day Will Come*
13. *Back to the Ground*
14. *Fascinating Rhythm*
15. *My Yard*

Alan Barnes - Sax (Alto) Isabella Cannell - Vocals (Background), Voices Ben Cullum - Bass (Electric), Vocal Arrangement, Vocals (Background) Jamie Cullum - Beats, Fender Rhodes, Guitar, Moog Synthesizer, Omnichord, Organ (Hammond), Percussion, Piano, Vocals, Wurlitzer, Xylophone Mark Emms - Vocals (Background), Voices Geoff Gascoyne - Bass (Acoustic), String Arrangements Ian Thomas - Drums, Percussion Terri Walker - Vocals (Background), Voices Gavyn Wright - Orchestra Leader

British pianist/vocalist Jamie Cullum's previous effort, *Twentysomething*, was an uncomplicated mix of piano-driven melodic pop with a jazzy twist and some reworked jazz standards. 2005's *Catching Tales* follows a similar format but falls short of its predecessor's simple approach by muddying up the production with dated electronic flourishes. Which isn't to say it's a bad album. On the contrary, despite some ill-advised attempts at would-be-hip DJ-style tracks, *Catching Tales* features more of Cullum's superb songwriting. Essentially a singer/songwriter in the tradition of such icons as Billy Joel and Randy Newman, Cullum is at his best when performing

simple melodic songs with some jazz harmony that make the most of his burnished croon and verbal wit. To these ends, the beautifully melancholy "London Skies" brings to mind Joe Jackson covering a Radiohead song. Similarly, the romantic and folky "Photograph" reveals the often sardonically snotty Cullum to be a top-notch balladeer. It's also at these soft rock moments, when he isn't attempting to gun down the jazz canon, that Cullum's improvisation sounds the best. Also impressive is his mid-tempo swing-cum-soul track "Nothing I Do," which marries Harry Connick, Jr.'s neo-croon to Stevie Wonder's R&B harmonies. If Cullum's only attempt at contemporary hipness was his inspired cover version of the Doves' "Catch the Sun," the album would be a rousing success. Unfortunately though, Cullum's expansive vision finds him collaborating with Dan the Automator on the leadoff track, "Get Your Way." What may have been an attempt to try something new ultimately sounds more like early-'90s hip-hop jazz à la Digable Planets replete with scratchy vinyl record sound and canned beat. Also disappointing is his reworking of the Harry Warren classic "I Only Have Eyes for You," which, while an attempt at a Massive Attack-style trip-hop track, sounds more like U2's equally atrocious 1990 Cole Porter redo "Night and Day." However, when Cullum sticks to his piano and a good melody Catching Tales actually bests Twentysomething and easily shakes the "new-jazz" tag he has been working against. ---Matt Collar

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