

tomajazz

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Canadian Heather Ferguson opens her first album with a melancholic, almost painful composition by Billy Strayhorn: "Lush Life". It is an introspective theme and whose interpretation requires not only skill, but also feeling. Undoubtedly a declaration of intent, so that we know from the first moment what the thing is about.

And it is that, unexpectedly, Heather Ferguson has gotten to play in the "professional" league. And this despite the fact that she, strictly speaking, would correspond to a lower category. But things have to be seen in perspective: she Ferguson began to sing when she was already a certain age, after having spent the first part of her life dedicated to other occupations. She herself recognizes that it is a kind of "second chance", a vital change of direction, when nobody would expect something like that. For this reason, I believe that we should not apply the same yardstick as with artists who enter music from "the beginning". After all, at Tomajazz we believe in second chances.

Ferguson has chosen a playlist of standards where there are any: "At Last", "The Look of Love", "Stardust"... On the one hand, it is understandable that he wanted to interpret themes recognizable by the public, which are, so to speak, "guaranteed". It is something common in first-time artists, who aspire to ensure the interest and empathy of listeners. The problem with all these songs —"Cry Me a River", "Bewitched", "Round Midnight"...— is that comparisons are inevitable. That wonderful version of her that our favorite singer did at the time comes to mind. And of course, it's different, because as we mentioned above, Heather Ferguson plays in another league.

But, if we manage to abstract ourselves from previous versions and focus on what we are listening to, we will enjoy the songs of Lush Life, because the truth is that Ferguson sings well. Her phrasing is more than correct and it is evident that she puts the passion that the songs require. On the other hand, and this is where you have to raise the note on this album, the musicians are very good, probably the best that can be found in Canada right now.

Here we find the likes of Joey Smith, a seasoned bassist and arranger who, at the time, spent two years touring with the Glenn Miller Orchestra; Anthony Genge, renowned Vancouver

keyboardist and professor in the Department of Music at St. Francis Xavier University; Damian Graham on percussion, who in addition to accompanying more than a dozen bands —Joshua Redman, The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Albert Collins...—, has worked as a music producer and music engineer; Barrie Sorensen, one of Canada's most in-demand tenor saxophones and current director of the Royal Canadian Navy's band, the Pacific Blue Big Band. Although if we have to highlight a name, we would choose the Cuban Miguelito Valdés and his fabulous trumpet (that beginning of “Stardust” or the solo of “Lush Life”!). It is not surprising that it has been claimed on more than one occasion by musicians like Herbie Hancock, Danilo Pérez or Wayne Shorter.

They all make up a backing band that deserves to be heard on its own. And yet, Heather Ferguson's voice manages to be heard on its own merits. Aware of her limitations in terms of her register, she knows how to take excellent advantage of her qualities and training in songs that would make less courageous singers doubt. A merit that must be recognized, there is no doubt. Summing up, we can say that this Canadian validates the saying that it is never too late if happiness is good. Or, if you prefer, it ain't over till it's over! May you enjoy it.

Juan F. Trillo