

Jazz

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Canadian singer does the GAS and standards not so much as a vocalist fronting a band, rather as one of a group of highly compatible musicians

Born in Toronto on 28 October 1959, Heather Ferguson moved while very young with her family to Victoria, BC. There she began to develop her interest in jazz singing, studying at Chywll Contemporary School, a division of Victoria Conservatory.

She took a long learning path, developing her technique and a thorough understanding of jazz and along the way meeting bassist, bandleader and composer Joey Smith who began coaching her. This led in turn to her performing at local venues, including Hermann's Jazz Club, and gradually acquiring a following. During this time, she also recorded some singles but it is only now that she has made an album.

Approaching her chosen material with understanding, Ferguson has a warm and strong vocal sound and she delivers songs in a manner that is at once commanding and comfortably relaxed. For the most part, her repertoire is drawn from the Great American Songbook, which she intersperses with jazz standards as is apparent here with songs such as Harry Warren & Mack Gordon's At Last, Hoagy Carmichael & Mitchell Parish's Stardust, Thelonious Monk & Bernie Hanighen's Round Midnight and Billy Strayhorn's Lush Life.

Whatever the material, Ferguson's jazz phrasing is evident and it vividly demonstrates the validity of the claim that she is an important figure in Canada's burgeoning jazz scene.

This set is not so much a singer with accompanying instrumentalists, but rather a very effective and well executed blending of highly compatible musicians. The instrumentalists include trumpeter Miguelito Valdes and tenor saxophonist Barrie Sorensen, both of whom have several very good solos. Also heard here is Joey Smith and pianist Jan Stirling, both of whom contribute arrangements.

This is a very accomplished and warmly recommended debut album by a singer whose reputation must surely spread internationally.

Bruce Crowther