



January 17th, 2023

Heather Ferguson is a jazz vocalist, based in Victoria, British Columbia. She recently released her debut album. Titled *Lush Life*, this disc contains wonderful renditions of some beloved standards. Joining her on this album are Tony Genge on piano and organ; Jan Stirling on piano; Joey Smith on guitar and bass; Damian Graham on drums; Kelby MacNayr on drums; Miguelito Valdes on flugelhorn, trumpet and congas; and Barrie Sorensen on saxophone. The album was produced by Wynn Gogol.

The album opens with its title track, “Lush Life.” Heather Ferguson’s voice is the focus here. In fact, as the song begins, her vocals are supported only by some subdued work on organ. I love her delivery of the lines “*Then you came along/With your siren song/To tempt me to madness.*” It is then that her voice rises, as if reacting to the thought or memory of that temptation. Then when she sings “*Yes, I was wrong/Again, I was wrong,*” the first line is delivered with disarming honesty, and “*Again*” in the second line is offered as one might say it after an argument. That approach pulls us in. It is after those lines that the song kicks in, and she tells us “*Life is lonely again,*” a line, or thought, that has come up again and again during the pandemic. “*Now life is awful again.*” Ah, but she is able to sing the line, so things can’t be that bad. And certainly the flugelhorn seems to agree that things are not terrible. We can get through as long as we have the music.

The saxophone then sets the tone for “Bewitched,” the Rodgers and Hart song. “*He’s a fool, and don’t I know it/But a fool can have his charms.*” Ah yes, we fools rely on that. And we can hear the love in her voice at the beginning, even before we get to that beautifully romantic section when she sings, “*I’m wild again/Beguiled again/A simpering, whimpering child again.*” Does someone play a random note when she sings the word “*whimpering,*” or

am I mad? There is something about her delivery that might in fact bewitch the listener, or at least warm him and soothe him. Heather Ferguson does choose the tamer set of lyrics, cutting out the lines about the man being at his best "*horizontally*" and about her being "*oversexed*." This track features a nice lead on saxophone. That's followed by "Body & Soul," which is completely cool from its opening moments. Bass and trumpet working together, how could it be anything but delicious? And when she comes in, her vocal approach is adjusted to work within the atmosphere created by those two instruments, her performance just absolutely wonderful. This is the track that will likely seduce a good number of listeners. And holy moly, listen to the way she belts out the final lines before then weakening for the final few words. Perfect. It is like she has surrendered, has done the very thing she said. This is one of my personal favorites.

Heather Ferguson's rendition of "At Last" features a pleasant groove and some warm, wonderful work on piano. And of course Heather Ferguson delivers another excellent vocal performance, the saxophone offering support and encouragement. "*You smile/And then the spell was cast/And here we are in heaven/For you are mine at last.*" Oh yes, listening to this music, and feeling the love of that special someone, I can believe that we are in heaven. And then Jan Stirling gets a chance to get a little more forceful on the keys, a great moment. I also love that playful moment near the end when Heather turns the perspective to address the fortune of the person she has been singing about: "*Oh baby, you don't know how lucky you are.*" That is perfect. That's followed by "The Look Of Love," a song written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David, and made popular by Dusty Springfield. I've always thought there was something cheesy about this song, but that doesn't stop me from enjoying it from time to time, and Heather Ferguson offers a good rendition. Things then start to swing with her version of "All The Things You Are." There is great joy in her voice as she sings, "*Someday my happy arms will hold you/And someday I'll know that moment divine/When all the things you are are mine.*" And her joy won't let her hold back. There are also delightful leads on both saxophone and flugelhorn.

The flugelhorn leads the way in this version of "Stardust," offering a somewhat melancholy, lonely sound. "*You wandered down the lane and far away/Leaving me a song that never dies/Love is now the stardust of yesterday/The music of the years gone by.*" After those lines, the song kicks in, developing a strong rhythm, seeming to be able to bring the two people together again, or at least able to create some sort of dream landscape where they can dance again. She follows that with a seriously good rendition of "Cry Me A River." There is something of a late-night vibe about it, particularly in that piano work, and in the saxophone. Heather Ferguson delivers another strong vocal performance, with some nice touches, like that disbelieving laugh after the line "*Now you say you love me.*" This is another of the album's highlights. It's followed by "Lover Man." "*Your huggin' and your kissin'/That's what I've been missin'.*" She delivers a sultry performance in this song of longing. The album then concludes with a gorgeous rendition of "Round Midnight,"

featuring another phenomenal vocal performance. When she tells us “*But it really gets bad around midnight,*” I just melt, particularly when she dips into her lower register on the word “*midnight.*” This track also features some moving work on piano.

Michael Doherty