

The Art of Jazz Singing

Notes for Listening CD Prepared by Dean Muench

Introduction

Maye invited me to put together some vocal recordings that interest me. I've selected two versions (some are instrumentals) of seven familiar tunes. By comparing and contrasting arrangements, instrumentation, grooves and moods, you will get your own ideas about how you will want to present your songs. As a bassist, my ears are often drawn to what is going on rhythmically in a performance, and my notes below reflect this. Enjoy!

Blue Skies

- 1-Ella Fitzgerald (1958)
- 2-Cassandra Wilson (1988)

This Irving Berlin tune (from the 20s!) is in a minor key, but it usually sets an upbeat, happy mood. Ella really digs in for her solo, leading the band through some exciting, building choruses. Cassandra Wilson sets a much darker tone with her delivery of this same great tune, accompanied only by bass and drums. Drummer Terri Lyne Carrington makes effective use of the space this small ensemble creates.

Seven Steps To Heaven

- 3-Miles Davis Quintet (1963)
- 4-Cassandra Wilson (1997)

This tune has a break in bars four, five, and six for fills—often played by the drummer (in this case, the young Tony Williams). Everyone is back right on beat one of bar seven. Wilson's arrangement includes an introduction and interlude vamp in 7/4. The percussion keeps the feel light and provides a contrast to the drum set later in the tune.

You Don't Know What Love Is

- 5-Tony Bennett and Bill Evans (1977)
- 6-Kurt Elling (2001)

Bill Evans provides a rich and complex accompaniment for Tony Bennett in this setting. Notice the simple rhythm Evans plays to set off the bridge from the rubato "A" section. Kurt Elling sets this ballad as a slow, light samba, laying some very long phrases onto the groove. There is some notable interaction in Elling's group. Check out the rhythm Elling sets up at the end of the first chorus; the pattern picked up by the drummer's brushes and then by the pianist as he begins his solo.

All Or Nothing At All

- 7-Patricia Barber (2000)
- 8-Betty Carter (1994)

Patricia Barber's arrangement is not unusual: her piano trio takes this standard through a two-feel and swinging four in familiar ways. But Barber's phrasing and harmonies create a unique atmosphere. Betty Carter needs only a double bass for her version. Here, Dave Holland is

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completely responsible for defining the tune: setting the groove, outlining the harmonic structure of the song form. Note how skillfully he brings Carter back in at the bridge after his solo.

Bli-Blip

- 9-Ella Fitzgerald with Duke Ellington Orchestra (1957)
- 10-Dianne Reeves with Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (1999)

Sheer joy! With all the breaks, backgrounds, and fills in these arrangements, the time has to be right on. The tempo on the LCJO version is a little brighter, but still nice and relaxed.

Someday My Prince Will Come

- 11-Miles Davis (1961)
- 12-Cassandra Wilson (1997)

(Inspiration can come from strange places. This song originally appeared in Walt Disney's Snow White! There are not many jazz waltzes, but this is one of the more frequently called 3/4 tunes.)

In Miles' recording, the pedal tone in the introduction and first statement of the melody creates a nice tension, and the feel is still light and open though his muted solo. The group really starts grooving at the tenor solo (John Coltrane) when the drummer switches to sticks and the bassist walks. Cassandra Wilson invites us to rethink this tune by setting it in 4/4 time. Her weird and moody guitar-based intro sets the tone for this version.

In Walked Bud

- 13-Thelonius Monk with Jon Hendricks (1968)
- 14-Carmen McRae (1988)

Thelonius Monk wrote this tune for his friend—and fellow piano innovator--Bud Powell who had died a few years earlier. Jon Hendricks sings the story of some of the great names of the late 40s jazz scene before throwing himself completely into his solo. From the moment Carmen McRae counts this one off, you know there is going to be some hard swinging.