

ROBIN McKELLE



BIOGRAPHY

It's a remarkable voice -- a soul-infused alto tinged with haunting echoes of the postwar jazz greats. For years its possessor, Robin McKelle, has inched closer to her inevitable destiny with the spotlight. Having shared stages with revered artists such as Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Terence Blanchard, Michael McDonald, Jon Secada and others, McKelle now assumes center stage with a debut solo album that exuberantly broadens the boundaries of retro-swing. Produced by trumpeter, arranger and clinician Willie Murillo (Brian Setzer Orchestra, Aimee Mann, LeAnn Rimes), *Introducing Robin McKelle* evokes the jazzy spirit of 1940's America, while retaining a contemporary edge that speaks of a new wartime. With its well-struck balance of potent swing and fearlessly sentimental balladry, the album heralds the arrival of a peerless interpretive artist.

Indeed, *Introducing Robin McKelle* finds McKelle breathing fresh life into classics many listeners thought they knew intimately. She transforms the Andrews Sisters' jaunty 1938 hit, "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen," into an insinuating Latin jazz tune, replete with lip-puckering tango and salsa rhythms. McKelle's hard-swinging take on Dinah Shore's breakthrough 1940 hit "Yes, My Darling Daughter" is no less miraculous, its sassy vocals and Lindy-Hopping rhythms offset by a come-hither rhumba break. The irresistible tandem of McKelle's voice and Murillo's arrangements combine on the after-midnight ballads "Come Rain Or Come Shine" and "For All We Know," while timeless swing numbers like "Something's Gotta Give" and "Sunny Side of the Street" are notable for their authoritative vocals, punchy big band arrangements and driving instrumental performances.

"The Forties," McKelle sighs, a hint of nostalgic bluesiness in her voice. "I was born to be in that time, I swear. You listen to the music from that period, and you picture these wonderful love stories between men and women. You picture how it was really supposed to be."

As befitting a recording made by an incurable romantic, *Introducing Robin McKelle* sounds more like a vintage live disc than the studio recording it really is. The album's brassy, on-the-fly sound is a homage to the days when jazz orchestras ruled America's dancehalls and concert theaters. "We took an old-school, big band approach, as opposed to the more modern three-harmony stuff," McKelle says. "The musicianship on this record really allowed me to step up. It pushed me to reach higher as a vocalist and a musician."

Working from a songbook that's over 70 years-old, McKelle and producer Murillo labored to invest *Introducing Robin McKelle* with an up-to-date relevance. Towards that goal, the duo employed old and new recording techniques, while coaxing some of McKelle's most emotive vocal performances.

"As a younger jazz singer, I don't feel like I could relate to the lyrics as much," the singer says. "There's so much going on in a song like 'For All We Know.' You have to have loved and gone through those storms to be able to sing that song in a way that people will be touched by it. 'Cause when you're 20 years old, even though you could be in love, you don't have that life experience to draw upon."

The experiences that shaped Robin McKelle's own life began in her hometown of Rochester, NY. The daughter of a liturgical singer, McKelle started her musical journey as classical piano student, then switched to playing keys in her high school jazz band. After attending the University of Miami and receiving her Bachelors of Music degree from the prestigious Berklee College of Music, she moved to LA and toured as a backup singer. "The entire experience was like, 'OK, this is NOT what I want to do,'" McKelle says, recalling her touring days with a laugh. "I wanna be in the front."

Moving back to Boston, McKelle started her own trio, then joined the Voice Dept. at her Berklee alma mater. In 2004, she entered the esteemed Thelonious Monk Vocal Jazz Competition in Washington, DC, taking third place honors. "That opened a lot of doors for me in the jazz world," McKelle says.

Indeed, it did. Just months after her DC performance, McKelle was offered a featured soloist spot with the Boston Pops Orchestra. She and her trio were invited to New York to perform privately for Blue Note Records CEO, Bruce Lundvall. McKelle has also had the privilege to perform for David Bowie, Carly Simon and Wayne Shorter in Berklee Commencement Concerts, BeBe Winans, Don Grusin and others.

Towards her goal of maintaining creative control, McKelle financed the initial sessions for *Introducing Robin McKelle* out-of-pocket. She found a permanent home for the CD at the ambitious Los Angeles indie label, Cheap Lullaby Records, who upon hearing what she had recorded, immediately got on board with the rest of the backing. Cheap Lullaby approached the award winning indie jazz label CANDID to help guide McKelle's career in the UK. Now, with her debut CD being released, the world can be introduced to Robin McKelle's rich, prismatic voice and her star-gazing jazz sound as she embarks on a European tour the summer with a London date confirmed for July 3 at the Pigalle Club. As its euphoric title suggests, *Introducing Robin McKelle* is nothing short of a yearning desire fulfilled!

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