



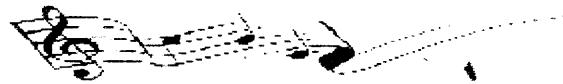
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New CDs, Classic CDs, and Books

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NEW CD'S

Etta Jones – “*SINGS LADY DAY*”



Etta Jones - "Sings Lady Day"

Billie Holiday, who arguably rates as the most influential female jazz singer (notwithstanding the enduring and well-deserved popularity of Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Carmen McRae), has no closer discipline than the late Etta Jones. Her final recording, "*Sings Lady Day*" (HighNote HCD 7078), released ironically on October 16, 2001, the day she passed of cancer, documents this connection better than any of the many previous recordings in her career that started in 1944 as a sixteen year old singer in the orchestra of Buddy Johnson.

The well-known similarities between the two in timbre and phrasing immediately evidence themselves. However, there are sufficient dissimilarities, even on this tribute to Billie Holiday, that firmly establish Ms Jones with her own very appealing vocal and personal identity. She differentiates herself by a more blues-based and powerfully open delivery, closer to Dinah Washington and Thelma Carpenter; two of her other admitted influences. Her intensely emotional attack coupled with a very controlled and clear reading of lyrics represented the core of her appeal. Although she dealt honestly and forcefully with the pain of love lost, as did Billie Holiday in such an unforgettably compelling way, Etta Jones projected a somewhat more positively hopeful mood, which was consistent with her exceedingly warm and open personality.

She became nationally known enough to sustain a full time musical career with her million selling 1960 recording of "*Don't Go To Strangers*" on Prestige in 1960, that was followed by "*Something Nice*," regarded by many as her finest work. Several Grammy nominations were received over the years, as well as consistent popularity for her recordings and appearances around the world.

This CD features two long time musical cohorts, pianist Richard Wyands and tenor saxophonist Houston Person, who as her close musical partner since 1968, is often mistaken as her husband, who was actually John Medlock of Washington, D.C. However, as strongly supportive and effective as their playing is, this reviewer found himself focusing even more on the moving guitar work of Peter Bernstein.

Since the recording occurred just four months prior to her passing, after a number of years of the illness, it is not surprising that virtually all nine songs use a slow or medium tempo. Despite this, she projects a reasonably strong voice throughout, as she also did when last seen by this long time admirer in May 2001 at the Village Vanguard. Singing while seated and limiting herself to six songs per set represented the only concessions she made.

The two medium tempo songs, "*All of Me*" and "*I Cried For You*" are taken at a gentle toe tapping, but urgent pace that she's clearly comfortable with. But the ballads are even more irresistible, which is to be expected given Billie Holiday's affinity for them. Two of these indelibly linked to her (both of which she wrote), "*Fine and Mellow*" and "*God Bless The Child*", especially command one's attention here. On the former, Ms. Jones softly announces her doing the final bar like "Miss Billie Holiday" and proceeds with an amazingly accurate simulation of her timbre and phrasing in a touching tribute. The CD closes with a less well-known ballad, "*You Better Go Now*", delivered with an effective sense of intimacy and regret.

On many of these songs and others, she employs a number of vocal devices that in the hands of a singer without her natural warmth, honesty and restraint could easily come off as excessive and theatrical. These include stretching a single syllable into multiple ones, repeating key words and phrases, allowing her voice to occasionally slightly crack, using a semi-yodel and dramatically holding a note an extended time. However, all of these work smoothly for her to credibly project emotion within the context of the song.

It was very fitting that Etta Jones chose to cap her long and successful career with this fine tribute to the singer that most inspired her and so many others.

TRACK LISTING: 1) *That Ole Devil Called Love* 2) *All Of Me* 3) *But Beautiful* 4) *You've Changed* 5) *I Cried For You* 6) *Fine And Mellow* 7) *God Bless The Child* 8) *Them There Eyes* 9) *You Better Go Now*.

PERSONNEL: Etta Jones, vocals; Houston Person, tenor saxophone; Richard Wyands, piano; Peter Bernstein, guitar; John Webber, bass; Chip White, drums.

- *By Thomas Pierce*

Etta Jones "*Sings Lady Day*" – High Note HCD 7078

