

JOYCE BREACH & WILLIAM ROY - "LOVE IS THE THING"

Reviewed By Thomas Pierce

Joyce Breach represents a classic example of a superior vocalist who is an unfamiliar name to much of the music buying public, including many admirers of sophisticated singing. Although she has seven CD's released on the Audiophile label, this reviewer sadly, was included in that group until December 2000. On that occasion, a mid-day Jazz program at St Peter's Church in New York City, she was invited by her good friend Barbara Lea, another fine vocalist to do several songs.

Since hearing her that day, I have often reflected on what aspect of her singing so immediately attracted me. Female vocalists of many genres - Jazz, R&B, Blues, Gospel, Soft Rock, Folk and Pop standards - have long been a personal passion, with a collection of hundreds of these artists. However, she had an earnestly straightforward, but soothingly elegant regard for lyrics that did not neatly fit into any of these categories. And her emotionally direct delivery included a knowing projection of love's pain and loss, which was bereft of any of the light, theatrical touches sometimes associated with cabaret, the field she is commonly associated with.

Subsequent research on her background revealed that in addition to having as early role models, singers focusing on faithful lyric enunciation like Judy Garland, Doris Day and Nat "King" Cole, she spent many years after graduating from West Virginia University in the 1960's, singing in Jazz clubs in Pittsburgh, prior to moving to New York in the mid 1990's. While her style does not include the improvisational phrasing and rhythmic emphasis of many jazz singers, I found the warm, open immediacy of her attack as compelling as theirs; especially those with a similar deep, rich sound. Taking all of this into account proves once again the folly of attempting to categorize talented artists who above all else are simply good singers.

This "Love Is The Thing" CD, released in October 2001 involves a repeat successful collaboration with pianist/composer/singer William Roy, who is also featured on her "This Moment", which received a 1998 Bistro award, as best CD. Her magnificent 1993 "Lovers After All" CD with the esteemed Sir Richard Rodney Bennett, also demonstrated as others have done that a recording with just voice and piano can be artistically compelling to those who appreciate intelligent, captivating songs convincingly sung with sensitive accompaniment.

The title track, written by Ned Washington and Victor Young, proves to be a mesmerizing opening, with an optimistic mood set by her beautiful middle range voice that soars smoothly, yet powerfully, like a graceful eagle.

"Alone Too Long", with beautiful lyrics by Dorothy Fields, finds her delivering this poignant explanation of the trepidations brought on by prolonged loneliness with an intelligent tenderness.

Another excellent female lyricist she favors, Carolyn Leigh, provides an excellent opportunity on "Don't Let A Good Thing Get away" to include a determined, advisory message to Michael Leonard's melody.

The sometimes over-used adjective "haunting" applies perfectly to her treatment of "Where Are You?" as Ms Breach's subtle sliding from the verse into the main body of the song's persistent questioning effectively establishes the appropriate sense of longing this Jimmy McHugh/Harold Adamson composition.

A yearning for some sentimental attachment in Arthur Schwartz/Howard Dietz' "Something To Remember You By" showcases her ability to move the listener in keys other than her smoky lower register.

William Roy joins her for some charming duet passages on the sprightly "Love Won't Let You Get Away", written by Jimmy Van Heusen and Sammy Cahn.

Observers often explain the lack of public awareness of artists like Joyce Breach by the reluctance in our current culture to do the type of focused listening required to appreciate this type of subtle, refined music. Although there clearly is much truth in this, I am still mindful of my own experience and that of many who have played her recordings for others, who invariably are immediately enchanted by the naturally exquisite voice of this superior vocalist.

PERSONNEL: Joyce Breach, vocals; William Roy, piano.

TRACK LISTING: 1) "Love Is The Thing". 2) "You Are Not My First Love". 3) "Alone Too Long". 4) "Charm". 5) "Don't Let A God Thing Get You Down". 6) "Where Are You"? 7) "Love, You Didn't Do Right By Me". 8) "After You Get What You Want" 9) "Something To Remember You By". 10) "Love Won't Let You Get Away" 11) "Why Did I Choose You". 12) "It's The Little Things". 13) "They Say It's spring". 14) "When Love Was All We Had". 15) "Oh, The Pity Of It All". 16) "Shady Lady Bird". 17) "Anyone Can Whistle". 18) "Goodbye For Now".