

Catherine Russell *Bring It Back*

JAZZ VILLAGE 579001

★★★★★

After decades as one of the strongest and most versatile backup singers in pop and rock (Steely Dan, Jackson Browne and Paul Simon), Catherine Russell has established herself as a premier interpreter of classic 20th-century jazz, blues and r&b.

By not trying to be “modern,” she has, paradoxically, created something new, retooling vintage tracks with vital, soulful vocals and striking new arrangements that burnish the blues and swing feeling that is the bedrock of jazz. She was the logical choice when HBO’s *Boardwalk Empire*

wanted someone to evoke the classic blues singer Mamie Smith for an episode that included the 1920 million-selling hit “Crazy Blues.” (The soundtrack won a Grammy.) Russell’s versions of classic tunes are sometimes even better than the originals.

On *Bring It Back*, she reinvigorates songs from three eras—the Jazz Age, the Swing Era and the r&b era—with equal fervor, accompanied by a sparkling tentet that transforms the tunes from museum pieces into modern-sounding vehicles for jazz expression. The album is dedicated to her famous parents: pianist-bandleader Luis Russell, who served as musical director to Louis Armstrong, and singer-bassist Carline Ray, an original member of the pioneering International Sweethearts of Rhythm.

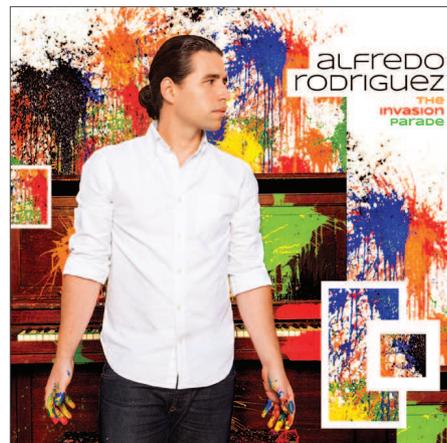
It’s unlikely that there will be a sexier jazz vocal performance this year than Russell’s rendition of “Aged And Mellow,” the 1952 Johnny Otis gem, unless it’s her smoldering delivery of “After The Lights Go Down Low.” On *Bring It Back*, Catherine Russell turns in her most fully realized vocal performances to date—by turns sassy, sexy, humorous, reflective and joyous.

—Allen Morrison

Bring It Back: *Bring It Back; I’m Shooting High; I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart; You Got To Swing And Sway; Aged And Mellow; The Darktown Strutters’ Ball; Lucille; You’ve Got Me Under Your Thumb; After The Lights Go Down Low; I’m Sticking With You Baby; Strange As It Seems; Public Melody Number One; I Cover The Waterfront.* (47:57)

Personnel: Catherine Russell, vocals, percussion; Matt Munisteri, guitar; Mark Shane, piano; Lee Hudson, Nicki Parrott (6), bass; Mark McLean, drums, percussion; Andy Farber, tenor saxophone; Jon-Erik Kelloso, Brian Pareschi, trumpet; Dan Block, alto, tenor (5) saxophones, clarinet (4); John Allred, trombone; Mark Lopeman, baritone saxophone; Glenn Patscha, Hammond B-3 organ.

Ordering info: jazzvillagemusic.com



Alfredo Rodríguez *The Invasion Parade*

MACK AVENUE 1079

★★★★★

Those who know Cuba beyond the mottled buildings of Old Havana and the beaches of Varadero and Caya Coco understand the country’s rich and varied culture, which extends far beyond a single nationwide signature. Local and regional musical styles abound, blended with contemporary sounds that no trade barrier can stop.

On his second recording since moving to the United States in 2009, pianist Alfredo Rodríguez dips his hands into as much as he can—the French and Haitian influence of Santiago de Cuba, the folkloric styles of the countryside and the relentless polyrhythms of Afro-Cuban music—and creates a highly personal pastiche.

The opening title song signals Rodríguez’s intention to do more than simply play within a single tradition. Instead, he hands the part of a Chinese trumpet to soprano saxophonist Roman Filiu and reinterprets the sound of a carnival parade winding through the streets of Santiago. His version of the hoary “Guantanamera” is filled with slippery drumming by Henry Cole and his own highly percussive piano. By turns joyous and sultry, “El Güije” introduces a South American vibe, with guest Esperanza Spalding paying tribute to Hermeto Pascoal with bird-like wordless vocals.

Rodríguez’s ambition to create music as dense and rich as Cuba itself is most fully realized in “Cubismo,” which puns on both the country’s name and the approach to abstract art popularized by Pablo Picasso around the same time as Cuba was gaining its independence. It’s a mash-up of modern timba dance rhythms and gutbucket stomp, highlighted by Billy Carrion’s infectious, grinding baritone sax. It ends the recording as an invitation to explore more of Rodríguez’s musical universe and the country he comes from.

—James Hale

The Invasion Parade: *The Invasion Parade; Guantanamera; El Güije; A Santa Barbara; Timberobot; Quizás, Quizás, Quizás; Snails In The Creek; Veinte Años; Cubismo.* (49:18)

Personnel: Alfredo Rodríguez, piano, keyboards, electronics, percussion; Roman Filiu, alto, soprano saxophone; Billy Carrion, baritone saxophone; Javier Porta, flute; Peter Slavov, bass; Esperanza Spalding (3, 7), vocals, bass; Pedrito Martínez (1, 3, 7, 9), vocals, percussion; Henry Cole, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: mackavenue.com

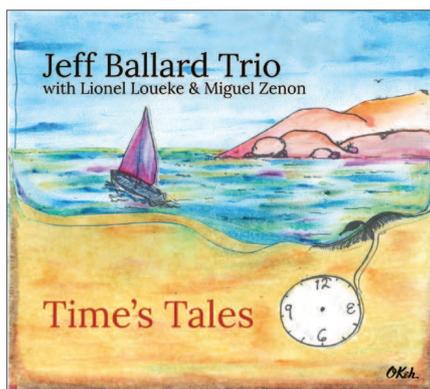
Jeff Ballard Trio *Time’s Tales*

OKEH 88883741072

★★★★½

A wide range of Jeff Ballard’s skills as a melodicist and percussive colorist on the kit are on display throughout this wildly diverse outing. The inventive drummer’s long overdue debut as a leader comes at the age of 50 and documents his long-standing group with guitarist Lionel Loueke and alto saxophonist Miguel Zenón. A rhythmically sophisticated, bass-less trio project, *Time’s Tales* travels from Loueke’s funky African-flavored opener “Virgin Forest,” a 9/4 vehicle that has Ballard alternately playing with his hands and sticks, to the oddly Ornette Coleman-ish “Western Wren (A Bird Call),” which has Zenón and Loueke locked in tight, birdcall-type unisons on top of the drummer’s brisk brushwork, to the raucous “Beat Street,” which opens as a second-line groover and morphs into a joyful drum showcase.

The trio’s sparse, free-floating take on Gershwin’s “The Man I Love” is a heartfelt homage to the late Paul Motian and his telepathic trio with Bill Frisell and Joe Lovano. Shifting gears radically, they surprisingly cover “Hangin’ Tree” by the California hard rock band Queens of the Stone Age. Here, Loueke uses power chords with his distortion pedal set on stun, and wails on his ferocious solo like Steve Vai, while Ballard slams with bombastic authority on the kit. More sur-



prises come on “Dal (A Rhythm Song), the trio’s atmospheric adaptation of Béla Bartók’s “44 Duos For Two Violins,” and on “El Reparador De Sueños,” their buoyant take on a bolero by Cuban composer Silvio Rodríguez.

The elastic nature of this eclectic triumvirate is further showcased on Loueke’s restful “Mivakpola” and two adventurous improv excursions, “Free 1” and “Free 3.” Ballard’s intuitive crew covers a broad stretch of musical territory on his ambitious first outing.

—Bill Milkowski

Time’s Tales: *Virgin Forest; Western Wren (A Bird Call); Beat Street; The Man I Love; Free 1; Hangin’ Tree; Dal (A Rhythm Song); El Reparador De Sueños; Mivakpola; Free 3.* (56:25)

Personnel: Jeff Ballard, drums, percussion; Lionel Loueke, guitar, vocals; Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone.

Ordering info: okeh-records.com