



Stacey Kent
The Changing Lights

WARNER BROS. 541162

★★★★

What is it about Stacey Kent? What makes her such a singular, instantly recognizable singer? The voice itself is surpassingly clear, warm and calm, and, in an androgynous age, unequivocally feminine. There's also her judicious phrasing, the way she creates an intimate sense of conversation with the listener. Or maybe it's the precise articulation—not just of words and notes, but of feelings. Sometimes she may remind you of Blossom Dearie or João Gilberto, but, like those two masters, Kent is a one-off.

The analogy to Gilberto is especially relevant: *The Changing Lights* is a love letter to Brazilian music. In the liner notes, offered in both Portuguese and English, she offers “a special thanks to all the composers and lyricists, musicians and poets of Brazil who have been such an inspiration to me.” A best-selling artist in Brazil and France—she's often touted as “the American voice loved around the world”—she sings here mostly in English, with several songs in flawless Portuguese and French. (She is also fluent in Italian and German.)

Her partnership with her husband, saxophonist-arranger-composer Jim Tomlinson, is in full flower on this outing. Tomlinson, who is musically as gentle of temperament as his spouse, is a pre-bop swing player influenced by Lester Young and bossa nova-era Stan Getz. His tasteful, melodic playing always complements Kent's vocals, never competes; and his elegantly swinging arrangements form velvet-lined jewel cases for Kent and her songs.

Three of the album's six originals continue the partnership of Tomlinson and British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro, who previously collaborated on striking songs for Kent such as “The Ice Hotel” and “Breakfast On The Morning Tram.” Tomlinson's discursive, inventive melodies are a good match for Ishiguro's frankly romantic, literary story-songs, such as “The Summer We Crossed Europe In The Rain” and the title tune, about long-ago lovers who meet again later in life, which is almost novelistic in scope.

As compelling and interesting as these songs are, they can't help but be eclipsed by masterpieces like “This Happy Madness,” the Jobim treat that opens the set, and Marcos Valle's “The Face

I Love,” both of which include lyrical, assured solos by Tomlinson. Legendary bossa nova singer-songwriter Roberto Menescal plays guitar on his classic “O Barquinho (The Little Boat)” and on a new Tomlinson song, “A Tarde,” with lyrics by Portuguese poet Antonio Ladeira. A first-rate rhythm section featuring pianist Graham Harvey and guitarist John Parricelli provides subtle support that rewards repeated listening.

Even if a few song choices may seem overly familiar (“One Note Samba,” “How Insensitive”), they are still spot-on renderings, arguably as good as anybody has recorded. One of the disc's two bonus tracks is “Quiet Nights”—but before you say, “Oh no, not another ‘Corcovado,’” this one offers a highly original

take on the standard, with an arrangement featuring a string quartet playing a pizzicato samba beat.

Kent and Tomlinson apparently have something very special going on. Together, they create a warm cocoon, an ideal romantic world that conveys the true spirit of Brazilian song.

—Allen Morrison

The Changing Lights: This Happy Madness; The Summer We Crossed Europe In The Rain; One Note Samba; Mais Uma Vez; Waiter, Oh Waiter; O Barquinho; The Changing Lights; How Insensitive; O Bêbado E A Equilibrista/Smile; Like A Lover; The Face I Love; A Tarde; Chanson Légère; Quiet Nights Of Quiet Stars (Corcovado); Meditation. (65:29)

Personnel: Stacey Kent, vocals; Jim Tomlinson, tenor, soprano saxophones, flute; Graham Harvey, piano, Fender Rhodes; Roberto Menescal, John Parricelli, guitar; Jeremy Brown, double bass; Matt Home, drums; Joshua Morrison, drums; Raymundo Bittencourt, ganza.

Ordering info: staceykent.com

RENOVATIONS AND IMPROVISATIONS ON:

Mozart, Sonata in B-Flat Major K.333

Bach, Italian Concerto BWV 971

Chopin, Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 23

Shostakovich, Preludes and Fugues, Op. 87

“John's vibrant and whimsical playing is totally engaging - *Off With The Cuffs* highlights his witty and clever sense of improvisation, and is great fun to listen to.”
Lisa Kaplan, Eighth Blackbird

“Imaginative, rigorous, and truly personal takes on the classics!”
Joseph Lin, The Julliard String Quartet

“FANTASTIC! There is such clarity and so much humor in Stetch's playing! I have always loved that about him.”
Rufus Reid

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