

Mp3 Kathleen Holeman - Don't You Wonder?



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Kathleen's jazz is hot and sultry, with a voice amazing in range and ability to the extremes, able to croon, cry, belt, scat and even preach to you on a wide variety of jazz and pop standards, backed up by an equally top-notch rhythm section. 14 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Jazz Vocals, JAZZ: Traditional Jazz Combo

Details: "Wow!" That's what fans of Kathleen Holeman have been saying over the past several years in response to the exciting talents of the Kansas City diva. Now, with this dazzling debut album, the buzz about Holeman is destined to ripple far beyond the Heartland. As *Don't You Wonder?* amply demonstrates, Holeman is clearly ready for prime time. Kathleen is a musician who just happens to sing. Significantly, she plays both piano (check her out in "Exactly Like You") and trombone ("I Don't Want to Set the World On Fire"). It's her singing, though, that carries the day. Gifted with a marvelous "instrument" of great precision (her intonation is pinpoint perfect) and power (you'd better put away the crystal before she hits high C), Kathleen is a telling interpreter of what Alec Wilder aptly called the American Popular Song, the rich repertoire of Tin Pan Alley, Broadway and Hollywood classics that continue to resonate as integral parts of the soundtrack to American life. Kathleen's powers as a storyteller are compelling. One poignant example is her sensitive reading of the seldom heard verse for Irving Berlin's "Blue Skies." An equally moving moment occurs in Kathleen's intimate limning of "Everytime We Say Goodbye," an exquisite duo with guitarist Rod Fleeman. In each (and, really, in all of the album's fourteen tracks), she invites us to share her innermost thoughts and emotions. Her clear diction is another asset. Did I mention that she swings? Well, in carrying on in the tradition of consummate artists such as Ella Fitzgerald, Kathleen phrases with dash and class. Since for many, *Don't You Wonder?* will be their introduction to the personable young singer, a bit of biography is in order. "My parents made sure that my four siblings and I had piano lessons and played instruments in the school band," recalls Kathleen. "My father loves to sing

all kinds of songs from different eras. When I was a kid, he had me sit at the piano and play them so that I could accompany him. Little did I know that so many of those songs could be jazz tunes." Along with piano lessons, Kathleen had vocal instruction for high school music contests. There were also trombone lessons. She received her B.S. in instrumental music education from Missouri Western State College, and then earned an M.A. in jazz from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Throughout her school years, Kathleen performed with a variety of jazz, country, gospel and salsa bands. She's worked with a "who's who" of Kansas City jazz elite including Pete Eye, Bram Wijnands, Rich Hill, Brian Hicks, Monte Musa, Kerry Strayer, and, of course, the excellent musicians featured here, pianist Paul Smith, guitarist Rod Fleeman, bassist Bob Branstetter and drummer Al Wiley. In her hometown of St. Joseph, Missouri, she's helped lift stages with the Ray Alburn Big Band since 1990. Kathleen, who correctly calls herself "a jazz singer," has been inspired by jazz stalwarts Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Irene Kral, Annie Ross, Tony Bennett, Mel Torme, Mark Murphy, Joe Williams and Eddie Jefferson. Other singers who have touched her include Jo Stafford, Patsy Cline, Judy Garland, Bonnie Raitt, James Taylor and the Ink Spots. "They are all masters of the singing craft," she points out. "The message of the lyrics comes through no matter what. They truly make the listener believe that they are singing to you, individually, the listener." That also applies to Kathleen. This is a good time for the vocalist. "I am a lucky person. I get to work at something I love. I love the freedom of jazz, and try to use that freedom constructively. Above all, I aim for the song's message. Even when I'm looking for ways to create new rhythms and melodies, the lyrics are central. I want the listener to understand every word and believe that the message comes straight from the heart." Connecting to the audience is critical for Kathleen. "I want to be creative and entertaining. I am driven by my own expectations and the smiles of an audience." Kathleen is also a first class improviser. "I only scat when I feel it's appropriate. The style of the song influences my scatting note choices and the overall rhythmic feel." In all, it's a winning combination that makes Don't You Wonder? a musical and dramatic treat. Kathleen credits husband Steve, her buddy Leslye, and colleagues Ray Alburn, Bob Branstetter and Paul Smith with pushing her to take the recording plunge. As for her supporting cast, she says simply that "they're the best, in terms of playing and attitude. They play from the heart and get along beautifully. Fortunately for me, Bob, Rod, Paul and Al are also great friends. I said 'I was lucky'." The recording session proceeded smoothly. "The guys are all pros and quite used to recording. I had done studio work, but mostly jingles and voice-over work. So, on the first day, I was quite

nervous. Thanks to the guys, I got over it quickly. Ron Ubel of Sound Trek also helped put me at ease. He's a gruff and lovable teddy bear. So we had lots of laughs and fun. Still, we were all perfectionists when it came to the sound we wanted, individually and collectively." Don't You Wonder? is a sharply focused snapshot of where Kathleen is at this important stage of her young career. "I want the album to show that I can handle different styles of songs, from different time periods and genres, and make them my own. I have grown musically and want this to document where I am right now. Hopefully, the listener will be open-minded and appreciate the variety." While the music more than speaks for itself, a few words are in order. "That's All," the album's refreshingly breezy opener, is propelled by an insouciant samba pulse that launches Kathleen's lithe, Ella-esque trajectories. "The scat duet was an accident," she confides. "I had put down several tracks and was trying to pick one. Ron then said, 'listen to this.' It was a combination of the two tracks. We all laughed and loved it. So it stayed. The song also means a lot to my husband Steve and me." "Don't You Wonder?," Kathleen's impressively penned title track, is a haunting original whose perfectly matched melody and lyrics express the brooding "what if" of a romance torn asunder. "The song is the product of a long stormy relationship which ended several years ago," Kathleen recalls. With its aura of brooding romantic angst, "Don't You Wonder?" creates an atmosphere of norish intrigue. It's also a harbinger of the singer's promising songwriting talent. "Blue Skies," after the lovely bitter-sweet opening verse, becomes a sophisticated swinger with Kathleen's sunny disposition lighting the way for dapper strolls by Bob and Paul. "Every Time We Say Goodbye" is Kathleen's tribute to the late Irene Kral, one of jazzdom's most original vocalists. In this exquisite "chamber" setting, Rod's thoughtful guitar cradles Kathleen's lovely voice with tender loving care. For a sample of Kathleen's ability to belt with Broadway bravado, "Get Happy" is not to be missed. Like Judy Garland's indelible version, Kathleen's declamation of Berlin's verse is a veritable "call to the sermon." In turn, the chorus is transformed into an insinuating waltz featuring Paul's dazzling pianistics. Obviously taken with Michel Legrand's "beautiful message and chord progression," Kathleen's poignant take on "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?" transcends to the heavens. Using Grady Tate's version of Van Morrison's "Moondance" as her point of departure, Kathleen and the band set a groove in motion that makes one want to get up and dance. Yeah! Dreamy romantic hues abound in the warm treatment of Ellington's "Mood Indigo," which additionally showcases Bob's plummy bass. "Masquerade" moves with a celebratory south-of-the-border gait, while "I Don't Want to Set the World On Fire" is, in Kathleen's word,

"retro." Indeed, with Kathleen's doubled trombone chorus and Rod's four-to-the-bar comping, it sounds like something from one of Woody's Allen period films set in the 1920s. More important, "This is a tribute to Daddy, who loves to sing this, and to the Ink Spots." The retro approach also informs "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," which is augmented with Kathleen's "protest" lyrics. Protest? Yes, indeed. Troubled by the greed threatening to ruin America's pastime, Kathleen pleads for the return of "old fashioned values." "Exactly Like You," a rhythmic tour de force featuring Kathleen's piano and Rod's guitar, also spotlights Kathleen's nimble scat work. Jobim's "Gentle Rain" returns us to Kathleen's intimate theatre of the heart and a wonderful outing by Rod. The finale is the rousing "How Sweet It Is to Be Loved By You," which although popularized by James Taylor and Marvin Gaye, swings here with a party-time, honky-tonk gait. Looking back on the date, Kathleen says, "I just want to help people enjoy themselves by giving them something different to listen to." Don't You Wonder? will also be a highly effective calling card for a singular new talent deserving wider recognition. No need to wonder now -- Kathleen Holeman has arrived! Dr. Chuck Berg, University of Kansas, July 2003 Contributor to DownBeat, JazzTimes, Jazz Educators Journal, the Oxford Companion to Jazz, and Gramophone Guide to CD Jazz; Co-Author of The Encyclopedia of Orson Welles; National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences

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