

Mp3 Maroon - Who The Sky Betrays



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Sexy, intelligent songs fuelled by hip-hop, rock and jazz grooves. 11 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Jazz Vocals, JAZZ: Weird Jazz Details: "A stunningly sophisticated and hugely successful work of art." - Dan McClenaghan, All About Jazz On their second CD, "Who the Sky Betrays," Brooklyn's MAROON gives the jazz tradition a jolt of contemporary pop music and politics. The result is a collection of sexy, intelligent songs fueled by hip-hop, rock, and jazz grooves, and laced with fiery lyrics and sophisticated jazz harmonies. The album, which features guitar hero Marc Ribot on five tracks, re-imagines familiar songs including Radiohead's "The Tourist," Soundgarden's "Black Hole Sun," and Chrissie Hynde's "Show Me," in radically new ways. "We really respect the work of Cassandra Wilson and The Bad Plus, artists who are keeping jazz relevant," says the band's co-leader and singer Hillary Maroon. "We grew up with rock songs, so why shouldn't we play them? It's our music." Whatever MAROON plays, whether it's a rock cover, a jazz standard, or one of their original songs, they test the boundaries between contemporary popular music and modern jazz. Radiohead's "The Tourist" receives an emotionally exposed reading by singer Maroon, a canny combination of technical finesse and smoldering feeling over a tapestry of intimate acoustic piano and spacey guitar electronics. Chrissie Hynde's "Show Me" is simple and direct from the heart, but emotionally rich and elegantly arranged. The confrontational, hip-hop flavored original, "Bully on the Block," is a "straight-up protest song" written in reaction to Secretary of State Colin Powell's characterization of U.S. foreign policy. Another original, "Spun Me Shaky" dissects a failed relationship with unsentimental candor, while "Is This the Time?" weaves a tale of social paranoia and political fear. Their acoustic version of Victor Young's standard "When I Fall in Love" gives Tin Pan Alley a new twist with an arrangement that sounds inspired by The Miles Davis Quintet of the 1960s. "Straddling genres just comes naturally to us," according to Maroon, who formed the band three years

ago in New York City with pianist Benny Lackner. "I'm a mixed black and Jewish girl from a small town in white upstate New York and Benny is German by way of California, so we bring in a lot of influences. Mixing it up is my natural agenda. I don't like being told to choose one side." Setting Victor Young and Radiohead side-by-side makes perfect sense to Lackner. "It's in keeping with the jazz tradition," he says, "in the beginning people were playing popular songs of the day. It makes our music more accessible to our generation." "There's something great about hearing musicians do an original interpretation of music that you know well," Maroon adds. "When we perform "Black Hole Sun," there's always a chuckle of appreciation that happens when we hit the chorus. That's a great feeling - to take people on a different journey with songs they know well. But often, people interpret rock songs and simply make it sound like their idea of how straight-ahead jazz has to sound. We try to go for what we hear, somewhere in between rock and jazz, for something that's 'us.'" Joining the co-leaders are veteran drummer Lance Carter and bassist Derek Nievergelt. The versatile percussionist appeared on Cassandra Wilson's Blue Light 'Til Dawn as well as avant jazz-rock guitarist Sonny Sharrock's last album, Highlife. Bassist Nievergelt appeared on trumpeter Terence Blanchard's Grammy-nominated Let's Get Lost, and has performed with saxophonist Greg Osby, vocalist Diana Krall, and pianist Jason Moran. "We've always been consciously going for more of a band approach, kind of a rock group state of mind," says Maroon. "This album is more successful in that way than the last one. Lance isn't afraid of hitting hard behind a singer - he really rocks. Derek has the perfect mixture of knowing when to hold down an ostinato and when to bring in a beautiful melodic improvisational moment or some hip-hop-influenced bounce." Adding to the quartet's core sound, guest guitarist Marc Ribot layered his characteristically jagged sound over half the album's tracks. "It was awesome to play with Marc because he's one of my longtime heroes," Maroon says. "He just has so many sound worlds at his fingertips. He responded immediately to whatever we or the producer (J Why) asked for, and then some." Also sitting in on the session are downtown avant-jazz horn players Nate Wooley (trumpet) and Alex Hamlin (alto sax). Much of the album's edge comes from the music's political overtones. "This album is very much in the shadow of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq," Maroon says. "I've always admired the great political lyricists, but it's only been recently that I've been able to do it myself in a way that satisfies me, and that's to make it more about the individual feelings that come up around the issues. I think paranoia, insecurity, fear, anger, and inner demons - all these themes are far better explored lyrically in rock than in jazz." "I won't be upset if

people are shocked by our sound because it's not their idea of jazz vocals," says Maroon. "We don't want to make museum music, the kind of 'jazz is our classical music' stuff that's fixed. We want to move things forward and experience new sounds." Lackner agrees: "It's just more exciting."

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