

MICHAEL DOHERTY'S MUSIC LOG

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SUNDAY, MAY 12, 2019

Hazel Mitchell-Bell: "Stronger Than Ever" (2019) CD Review



On her new album, *Stronger Than Ever*, vocalist Hazel Mitchell-Bell delivers some passionate and moving renditions of classic material, including songs by

Nina Simone, Ann Ronell and Antonio Carlos Jobim. Joining her on this release are Craig Alston on saxophone and flute, Vince Evans on piano and keyboards, Robert Fiester on guitar, James B. King Jr. on bass, J.C. Jefferson Jr. on drums, Asali Ruth McIntyre on violin, Bonnie Grier on violin, Gerard Battle on viola, Denna Purdie on cello, Chris Barrick on vibraphones, and Kim Sator-Randolph on harp.

The album opens with Nina Simone's compelling "Four Women," a

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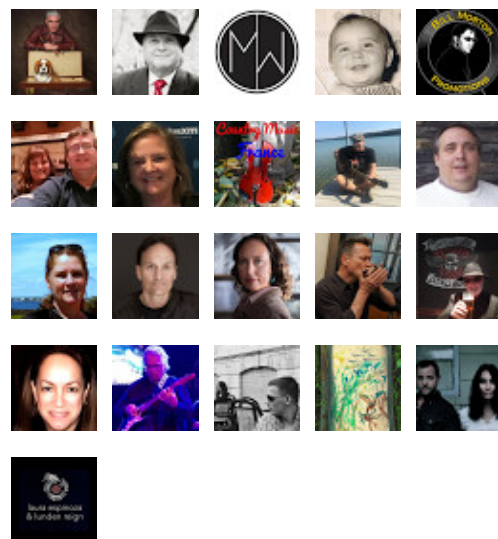
rather daring choice for a lead-off track. Hazel Mitchell-Bell delivers an excellent vocal performance, embodying different characters. There is drama to this piece, to her delivery. *“My skin is brown/My manner is tough/I’ll kill the first mother I see/’Cause my life has been rough/Yes, I’m awfully bitter these days/Because my parents were slaves.”* There are some wonderful touches on piano here. There is also a really nice piano part to “Autumn Leaves.” The bass has a relaxed feel, but this version isn’t really mellow. Hazel’s vocals and the flute have an undeniable energy.

Hazel Mitchell-Bell then moves into the 1970s with “Everything Must Change,” a haunting song written by Benard Ighner and recorded by Nina Simone, Randy Crawford and others. *“Everything must change/Nothing stays the same/Everyone must change/No one stays the same/The young become the old.”* Again, Hazel delivers a passionate and moving vocal performance. This rendition also features some good work on saxophone, and some pretty work on piano. Hazel Mitchell-Bell remains in the 1970s for a cool, smooth, soulful rendition of “Feel Like Makin’ Love” (here written has “Feel Like Making Love”), a song that was written by Eugene McDaniels and originally recorded by Roberta Flack. *“That’s the time I feel like making sweet love to you/Come on, boy, now/That’s the time I feel like making all my dreams come true.”* Ah, who could turn her down? This track features a nice lead on saxophone.

Hazel’s version of “I Wish You Love” begins with some passionate and stirring vocals. Then, once it kicks in, it swings. *“I wish you shelter from the storm/A cozy fire to keep you warm/But most of all, when snowflakes fall, I wish you love.”* Oh yes, Hazel really lets it rip here at moments. “Willow Weep For Me” opens with bass, and immediately is one of my favorite tracks. I love hearing Hazel’s vocals supported by just bass at the beginning. Then when the other musicians come in, the track becomes even cooler somehow. What an excellent take on this song, with wonderful touches on keys and sax. Plus, there is a lead on bass partway through. There is also something kind of sexy about her approach, particularly when she sings *“Bend your branches down along the ground and cover me.”*

Hazel Mitchell-Bell delivers a lively rendition of “One Note Samba,” a tune written by Antonio Carlos Jobim. She is clearly enjoying herself here, and gives us an excellent performance. That’s followed by “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face,” a song that was originally a folk song, and has been recorded by a lot of artists over the years. From the start, Hazel Mitchell-Bell’s version has a gorgeous, late-night vibe, in

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part because of the saxophone. Then “Let There Be Love” has a joyful swing. I dig the instrumental section in the second half of the track, with great stuff on saxophone. That bass really grooves, pops and swings. *“But first of all, please let there be love.”* Yes.

CD Track List

1. Four Women
2. Autumn Leaves
3. Everything Must Change
4. Feel Like Making Love
5. I Wish You Love
6. Louisiana Sunday Afternoon
7. Willow Weep For Me
8. Rio de Janeiro Blue
9. Skylark
10. One Note Samba
11. The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face
12. Let There Be Love
13. The Makings Of You

Stronger Than Ever was released on CD on May 3, 2019, but apparently was available digitally before that.

POSTED BY [MICHAEL DOHERTY](#) AT 4:19 PM

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 **MICHAEL DOHERTY**

I started the music blog to let people know about all the good music that is out there. I only review CDs that I like. (This is partly selfish, as I don't want to listen to music I dislike.) Good Things About Bad Movies is about finding something good even in the worst films. I created an index,

with a list of all of my blog entries, including Shakespeare entries and music reviews, arranged alphabetically by subject. Here is the link:

<http://michaeldohertyindex.blogspot.com/> My friend Jason and I have a web series, "Grandmother Winsome's Variety Minute," and several episodes are up on You Tube, and also on the Grandmother's Fanny Game blog. What else? I am fascinated by the Marquis De Sade and Elizabeth Bathory. I often make decisions based on the humor factor.

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