



Jazz Promo Services

Sarah DeLeo – *The Nearness of You*
Sweet Sassy Music SSM-1001
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Sarah DeLeo's debut CD, ***The Nearness of You***, is an up close and personal look at a talented young vocalist who brings her own personality and perspective to a pleasing program of classics from the Great American Songbook. Accompanied by a first class cast of musicians, including her coproducer Brian Charette on piano, David Cook on Fender Rhodes, Chris Bergson on guitar, Mark Verdino on bass, Diego Voglino on drums and Chuck Mackinnon on trumpet, DeLeo breathes new life into these wonderful songs with a pretty voice and a distinctive delivery that makes the words she sings seem like they were written just for her.

DeLeo begins the date with a fresh new interpretation of ***"If I Had You,"*** a song she first heard in high school on a Judy Garland recording from the thirties. Not wanting to do the song as a ballad, she eventually decided to try it as a bossa nova. The rhythm works well with the lyric and melody, conveying a feeling that is, in the words of the singer, "romantic and a little wistful, but ultimately hopeful." Brian Charette's piano accompaniment gives the music an authentic Brazilian feel, reminiscent of the swinging sounds of Sergio Mendes' Brazil 66.

Peggy Lee's ***"It's a Good Day"*** proves to be a perfect vehicle for DeLeo's sweet, full-bodied voice and nuanced phrasing. Her rubato opening chorus convincingly conveys the melancholy mood of the ironic lyric, before she gradually picks up the tempo and begins gently swinging the song as a jazz waltz, transforming the feeling to one of cheerfulness. After Charette solos tastefully over Verdino's walking bass, the singer returns swinging even more emphatically, to conclude the tune on an optimistic note.

The title track, Ned Washington and Hoagy Carmichael's ***"The Nearness of You,"*** starts off with DeLeo's tender, heartfelt reading of the song's seldom-heard verse (with its cleverly alliterative line, "I'm in a dither dear, when you're at a distance"), ably assisted by Chris Bergson's warm mellow guitar. The two seamlessly segue into the well-known melody, to be joined by the rhythm section for a moving rendition of one of the most popular ballads in the vocal jazz repertory.

DeLeo was inspired to perform Lew Herman's ***"(The Night Time is) The Right Time,"*** after hearing a Joe Williams' recording of the blues classic. She takes her own sweet time with the song, suggestively singing the assertive lyric with a coy sexiness. Bergson's solo shows the guitarist to also be a capable bluesman.

"The Glory of Love," by Billy Hill, was one of the songs DeLeo began singing when she first started working around New York City. She dropped it from her repertoire because she was having difficulty finding the right feel for it, but later revived it. Inspired by the work of rapper Mos Def, DeLeo experimented with the artist's beats in her repertoire. ***"The Glory of Love"*** worked well with the funky rhythms, resulting in this inventive arrangement.

Always on the lookout for contemporary material, DeLeo found Erin McKeown's **"Blackbirds"** while listening to CDs at Tower Records. Liking the song's narrative nature she decided to try it, giving it a brand new treatment by singing it over the beats she heard on a song from Erykah Badu's album, **Baduizm**. Cook's Fender Rhodes and Bergson's guitar give the arrangement a mysterious air that is buoyed by Chuck Mackinnon's earthy trumpet.

DeLeo had a friend transcribe **"Too Young for the Blues"** for her, from a recording she had by Ella Fitzgerald. She delivers the lyrics with a coquettish tongue in cheek, feigning naiveté as she sings words like "I'm a baby and your kiss is so tender," without ever sacrificing any of her bluesy sophistication.

"Angel Eyes" has DeLeo baring her soul, singing the song as a duo with bassist Mark Verdino. The spare arrangement by Kirk Nurock has a 12 bar intro, over which the singer wordlessly improvises, prior to her stirring reading of the emotional lyric. It ends similarly, with DeLeo mixing words and sounds for the final eight bars.

Rodgers and Hart's **"It's Easy to Remember"** is another popular song to which DeLeo feels a real connection. The uncluttered accompaniment of the trio of Bergson's guitar, Verdino's bass and Voglino's brushes shines the spotlight clearly on the singer's beautiful voice, showcasing her attractive tonality and impeccable diction.

The disc concludes by coming full circle with another bossa nova arrangement of a Great American Songbook standard, **"So in Love."** The Cole Porter classic proves to be particularly well suited to the South American rhythm, which heightens the drama inherent in the romantic lyric, allowing DeLeo to invoke a theatrical flair that brings the song to life.

There is life in all of the music on **The Nearness of You**. Each of the ten tracks tells a different life story. They are stories that Sarah DeLeo knows very well – full of love and romance, but never too far from the blues.

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