

BI GRAPHY

Rita Coolidge

Most music fans have a favorite song recorded by two-time GRAMMY® award-winner Rita Coolidge— “Fever,” “We’re All Alone,” “One Fine Day,” “(Your Love Has Lifted Me) Higher & Higher,” “The Way You Do The Things You Do,” “All Time High,” “Superstar,” and so many other memorable tracks that topped the charts from the 1970’s onward. It is perhaps due to Coolidge’s pop and rock pedigree that many of her fans are unaware of her longstanding affection for jazz, however. Her debut release for Concord Records, *And So Is Love* (CCD-2271-2), a collection of well-loved jazz standards, is sure to change all that. It will also undoubtedly add a few jazz chestnuts to that lengthy list of songs Coolidge has already made her own.

When Coolidge signed with new management a few years back, she put recording a jazz album on the top of her wish list. “I loved the experience of making my first jazz record with Barbara Carroll in the 1970s,” Coolidge recalls, “and I’ve always loved the jazz singers—Nancy Wilson, Rosemary Clooney, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and especially Peggy Lee, who’ve I have admired since I was three-years old.” Coolidge continues, “I’ve always wanted to get over to the jazz side and am deeply grateful that [Concord Records’ executive producer] John Burk believed in me enough to help me make this recording. He should have a star in heaven.”

Along with Burk (who most recently spearheaded the multi-GRAMMY winning *Genius Loves Company* duets project from Ray Charles), *And So Is Love* was co-produced by legendary bassist and co-founder of the Yellowjackets, Jimmy Haslip. Coolidge says, “I have never met a more talented, funnier, more perfect person. His energy is unbelievable, he’s full of life, full of music, and he’s passionate about all of it, from the nitty gritty stuff to tracking. Jimmy has amazing ears and has such a gift of bringing the right people into the recording.”

“This was a challenging project, for me, the greatest of lessons, because I hadn’t recorded before with hard-core jazz musicians,” Coolidge admits. Haslip invited two pianists—his Yellowjackets band mate, Russell Ferrante, and the versatile Alan Pasqua (Ray Charles, Queen Latifah, Rod Stewart)—to join the project and create the nucleus of two ace bands that would accompany the singer’s powerful vocals. The other musicians featured on the disk are: Terri Lyne Carrington and Ralph Humphrey (drums); Alex Acuna (percussion); Chuck Berghofer, Dave Carpenter and Darek Oles (bass); Bob Sheppard (alto flute, soprano sax); Larry Koonse and Sandro Albert (guitar); Dave Samuels (vibraphone); Stephanie Fife (flute), and Ronnie Cuber (baritone sax). A duet between Coolidge and her longtime musical cohort, the inimitable Herb Alpert, is the distinctive centerpiece of the sultry bossa nova classic, “Estaté”—the interchange between Alpert and Coolidge is indisputably charged with all the passion one might hope for in an evocative, romantic tune.

In all her musical endeavors, Coolidge has remained true to a sense of spirit, of discovery, of meaningful contribution, and of paying respect to those who’ve come before her. “I’ve always felt singing is about the spaces left, the spaces not taken up, about breathing space,” says Coolidge, who selected three tunes for this date: “Cry Me A River,” “Don’t Smoke in

Bed” and “I Don’t Know Enough About You.” The latter two tunes were selected in homage to Peggy Lee, about whom, Coolidge laughingly says, “I would have done an entire album of Peggy songs if they’d let me. Last summer in Amsterdam, I did a whole big band show of all Peggy tunes, and I always sneak a Peg tune in now and then when I’m performing. I was the first to re-record ‘Fever,’ which was a big hit for the both of us. I loved her so much, and it was a big thrill to meet her. We became pretty good buddies. ‘Don’t Smoke in Bed’ is one of the great Peggy Lee tunes,” says Coolidge, “it’s like a little movie, a vignette.”

This set kicks off with a tune often performed by Ray Charles, “Come Rain or Come Shine,” and Coolidge quickly sets the tone for the rest of the CD with her smoky tones and soulful interpretation. “Ray had just passed and John and I agreed we wanted to do something to honor him. He was such an amazing guy. I had a session scheduled with him right after the Sylmar (California) earthquake in the early ‘70s. I was terrified, and Ray called to see if I was still coming to the session. My voice on the phone was shaky and he said, ‘well, you can’t have a little thing like an earthquake mess up your day if you’re going to live here in California!’” she laughs.

“Save Your Love for Me,” “I Thought About You,” “Don’t Go To Strangers,” “The Masquerade is Over,” “Sentimental Journey,” and “More Than You Know” are all familiar jazz tunes, and each is delivered with fresh verve and emotion by a masterful vocalist. “I’ve always loved the jazz singers, and part of the beauty of their work is that they’re not limited by age. Jazz singers are more and more revered as they become mature,” she says. As testament to that sentiment, Coolidge revisits “We’re All Alone,” a tune she recorded some years back, singing it now from a more worldly perspective. “Years and years of life experience go into singing all these songs. You just have to walk through it all: no one can tell you what you’ll feel like, how you’ll experience things, you just have to live it. Someone once asked Patti LaBelle when she’d stop working and she said, ‘probably four days after I’m buried!’ Singers, the women, they inspired me to do this record,” says Coolidge.

“We have a relationship with music,” she concludes, “and it represents our relationship with ourselves and with other people. The importance of family, is intertwined with our spiritual path. In my nation, the Cherokee nation, women are revered as they age. I am in the middle of the process, and I’m trying to embrace it with grace and dignity. I am making a conscious effort to give back everything I’ve learned.”

And So Is Love, her heartfelt contribution to the jazz book, certainly gives back what she’s learned, but it presents something new, something fresh, as well: Rita Coolidge, jazz singer, ready to share (and perhaps even introduce) her prodigious talents with jazz fans. “There’s a whole new world waiting out there for me and I’m excited about stepping into it. In the last 12 months, I’ve got a new husband, a new grandbaby, and a new record. It’s been a damn good year!”

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