

Vanessa Rubin

Check the phrasing. When some jazz singers address tunes oriented toward the modern pop arena, they use the same approach applied to the swing tunes with which they're familiar. On the splendid Vanessa Rubin *Sings*, the increasingly impressive New York vocalist shifts gears like a Tour de France cyclist negotiating hills and straightways: masterful in her strategies of adaption.

Rubin knows that in order to sway an audience, different styles demand specific elements be in place. On her fourth Novus/RCA date, she stresses that pliancy. Tunes as different as Kurt Weill's *My Ship* and Sting's *Seven Days* aren't treated like twins, more like long lost cousins. Rubin, as *Sings* surely confirms, is currently aware of interpretation's most minute details.

"This whole record ended up being intimate and very personal. I think because of the sparse instrumentation, and the fact that I was asked to stretch myself... well in stretching I went deeper inside to accomplish what I needed to. And it really puts me out there. Who I am is laid on the line. You can hear the perfections or imperfections immediatly."

It's this kind of diligence and candor that has moved the vocalist into the global spotlight. Respect for Rubin's work has grown with every new record, and the musicians she surrounds herself with are the finest.

Rubin has been based in New York for 13 years now. With roots in Cleveland, Ohio, where she began singing seriously with a quartet whose regard was known region-wide, her chops were already honed upon her arrival. That prowess impressed pianist Barry Harris, with whom the singer studied at his Jazz Cultural Theatre.

"I didn't know anybody here, I was looking to network. But more importantly, he and Frank Forster helped me set some standards as far as what I was going to need to do as a vocalist who is able to compete. These guys helped shape the music of which I was aspiring to be a professional. What better place to learn? Because of who they are, they instilled some of their drive and determination in me and other students. And that's almost as important as knowing the music. They wouldn't let you half-step. They wanted you to have what they have: longevity."

One gets the feeling that the act of singing, in and of itself, is a thrill to Rubin. The process gets her closer to the kind of articulation necessary to make a mark in jazz. "As artists we struggle to develop our own voice. Creating a new voice and moving the music in a new direction is extremley difficult. There are Miles and Betty Carter and people like that. But I feel you can have your own style and voice even as you strive to attain their level of artistry."

The process of keeping things fresh - substantial for Rubin - elicits the interpretation of pieces that aren't often sung. "I listened to how tunes affected me, because I relate emotionally more than technically. And the words have got to say something I can relate to." So at her concerts Sting shares space with Johnny Mandel, and Gershwin opens a gig that might end with a spiritual. Rubin doesn't sweat the blend between styles.