

Andrea Wolper – The Small Hours

by Skoot Larson

Andrea Wolper has a mellow voice and style to be savored like a fine wine. So much more than just a girl jazz singer, Andrea uses her voice as a finely tuned instrument, keeping interest and attention by the way she blends with her fellow musicians. Wolper doesn't sing in front of the band, she *weaves* her *voice* into the fabric of the band.

”**The Small Hours**”, Wolper’s latest recording, is just what it says: a lonely, soulful 3:00 a.m. lament. Many of the songs are ballades, but the fine touch of Ron Affif’s guitar over the creative bass work of Ken Filiano keeps it moving nicely, never dragging. This very vouty CD is a unique work, each tune an unexpected pleasure as Ms. Wolper sculpts the notes individually, sometimes scat singing so subtlety it feels like that’s the way the tune was composed.

The work opens with Rodgers and Hart’s “Dancing on the Ceiling,” a song usually done at a bouncy, medium tempo. Wolper molds this bit of clay into a deep, entrancing, madrigal-tinged offering. Her placement of the lyrics over the constant of Affif’s guitar and Filiano’s bass weaves a web to entrap her listeners from the first note.

On a majority of the material Wolper performs her magic over a background of only guitar and bass. Each of these selections is fleshed out by very tasty solo work from the other two members of the trio.

A haunting, minor, Middle Eastern feeling featuring the fine flute work of Lou Marini interwoven with Wolper’s chant-like interpretation give an almost religious touch to “You and the Night and the Music.” With Wolper’s chanted solo, one can easily picture dervishes whirling around the band. The subtle drum work of Victor Lewis drives this caravan through the desert.

Andrea Wolper is also a brilliant composer, as three of her original work on this, “Gray, Not Blue,” “Not Sleeping in Your Arms,” and “Rendezvous in Providence” attest. “Rendezvous in Providence” is a melody Wolper composed around a poem written by D. Norkse. Norkse’s poem is impressively set to a vocal and contrabass duet with Filiano.

Wolper's lyrics on "Gray, Not Blue," tell a lonely "small hours" story in a blue melody that is anything but gray; the word flowing straight from the heart through the mellow comping of bass and guitar.

"Lovely Not Sleeping in Your Arms" is kind of eavesdropping on a one-sided lover's "morning after" telephone call; conversational poetry that sounds almost regretful until the entire story is told. This lady's written words are truly as fascinating as her vocal inflections and prowess.

Even the popular works of other genres come alive at Wolper's touch, a good example being Randy Spark's old folk song "Today." Wolper begins this piece sharing a slow easy tempo intro with guitarist Affif that dances into a nicely swinging 4/4 for the duration, ending with a cheerful bit of scat fading out the final coda.

In many cases, Wolper surprises with her choice of tempos or rhythms; not what one would commonly associate with the chosen songs. Bobby Timmon's up-tempo call-and-response blues tune becomes a fragile eggshell ballade in Wolper's hands, as she cries it into a heartfelt moan!

Filiano's arco bass introduces Bob Dorough and Fran Landesman's beat anthem, "A Small Day Tomorrow." Wolper's sparse, shadow interpretation here rivals that of the late Irene Kral, the lady who turned this tune into a jazz standard.

More than half the tracks here are performed with the guitar-bass trio, but when a set beat is required, the drum-kit drive is well provided by either Victor Lewis or Jamey Haddad. Frank London contributes some exceptional trumpet and flugelhorn to the date as well, with an especially sweet muted trumpet intro and solo on "Night Time Was My Mother," another tale of loneliness and sorrow.

"**The Small Hours**" is one of those rare five-star discs with twelve equally fine tracks. Every cut of Andrea Wolper's latest work is deserving of radio airplay, and this writer hopes that the music directors of the globe's jazz stations discover "**The Small Hours**" as quickly as possible.

"**The Small Hours**," just like Andrea Wolper's previous self-titled CD, belongs in the collection of all serious vocal jazz fans. Both of these titles can be purchased at www.cdbaby.com, or through the crew at Cadence. To learn more about this wonderful musician, composer, lyricist and singer, visit www.andreawolper.com.

