

Liner Notes, Starry Starry Night (JACD1025)

For years I have wished to compile tunes for a recording around the theme of the night: a nocturnal paean to the quietest time on the clock. I kept hesitating as many songs having to do with the absence of sun tend to be quite “dark” in both subject matter and musical content. The dilemma of how to ameliorate the inky blackness eluded me until I began to think of a list of songs involving stars, those distant spheres of brightness capable of penetrating even the thickest blanket of night if the sky is clear. Finally, I had the melding of themes that I anticipated would yield great results once Anne and I embarked on our exploration. If you have the CD and have come here looking for comments on the tracks, you are in the right place!! Put it on, grab a nighttime quaff (anything from whiskey to warm milk—but please not in the same glass; although this has been a favorite mixture to various Scottish insomniacs, it succeeds only in a dilution of the spirits, which sad state never fails to lower mine—is appropriate) and join us on this journey to (with apologies to Sendak) where the quiet things are.

We embark on our journey with two of the earliest pop songs concerning the theme of nighttime. *Deep Night* has a haunting melody from Charles Henderson that was provided words (and popularized) by none other than Rudy Vallee. Jazz singer Ruth Etting contributed a notable cover with, as expected, a jazzier, darker cadence. A year later in 1930, Fred Fisher contributed *Blue is the Night* for the film “Their Own Desire” of the same year. Norma Shearer sang it in the film and the words are as good as the melody. As a note, while copyright prevents me from copying the lyrics here in these notes, if one Googles any of these titles with the subheading “lyrics” they inevitably appear. Enjoyment of each of these tunes will be greatly enhanced by a knowledge of the lyrics (which we decided to leave off this recording for two reasons: 1) the mystical quality of Anne’s flute would have been given short shrift and 2) most of these songs are inappropriate to be abused by my whiskey (no milk) tenor).

A beautiful, lilting contrast to our first track comes in the form of the English tune *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square*, a song that understandably enjoyed huge popularity during the 1940’s. It was introduced in 1940 in the West End production “London Revue” by English chanteuse Judy Campbell. Over on our side of the pond the song was a big hit for Glenn Miller and company. In our version, I eschewed the melody in my introductory half-chorus so it could find full potential in the hands and lips of Anne.

A song that I have never enjoyed—mainly because of the Sinatra version: “Doo-bee Doo-bee Doo???”—puh-leaze) made it onto our list when I slowed the tempo down and heard Anne giving full voice to the tentative, mystifying qualities of the melody. *Strangers in the Night* is now one of my favorite pieces and certainly one of the best by Bert Kaempfert and friends, who wrote it for the 1966 film, “A Man Could Get Killed.”

The tune to end all tunes, one of the most recorded songs in the Western world and the only REQUIRED tune in this collection started out as an unremarkable medium-tempo foxtrot. Hoagy Carmichael penned a ditty in 1927 called *Star Dust* loosely based on some improvisatory phrases by jazz pal Bix Beiderbecke (whose cornet lines Hoagy would lift even more comprehensively and successfully for his later piece *Skylark*—to be found on Ivory&Gold Reflections of Love, JACD 1016). If the story had stopped there, the song might very well have faded into obscurity. The magic occurred in 1928 when

prolific word-wizard Mitchell Parish was brought in by publisher Irving Mills to convince Carmichael to slow the tempo down so that Parish could write some lyrics to the angular melody (Carmichael had already taken a crack at this with middling results). Parish's poetic phrases softened Hoagy's jazzy leaps, they republished the tune in 1929 and immortality for all concerned and the song itself was the result. It would be easier to list those who have NOT recorded the tune (Rachmaninov, Ozzy Osbourne) than those who have. Thanks to Dick Hyman for the harmonization of the last phrase.

Musically, I have only recently been able to grasp Monk's *'Round Midnight* well enough to even accompany Anne let alone essay it as a solo. It is a complex, yet beautiful piece of melancholia. It would be a perfect backdrop to an opening scene to a movie in the *film noir* genre. Trumpeter Cootie Williams premiered it with his orchestra and Linda Ronstadt revived it with Nelson Riddle. Probably the most affecting version was a bit of vocalise by Bobby McFerrin for the film of the same name as the song. I love how Anne gets her rich tone in the lower register; it has never sounded better than right here!

Cliff "Ukelele Ike" Edwards was a HUGE star in the late 1920's and early 1930's. By 1940 he was virtually a vagabond. Fortuitously, he was hired to give voice to the Disney character Jiminy Cricket in the animated film "Pinocchio" in which he sang the song *When You Wish Upon a Star*, which won the Academy award for Best Song in 1940. Song and character revived Edwards' career and produced for him a new generation of listeners. It is a hopeful, light-hearted song so we kept this one gentle and optimistic.

For me, the most haunting track on the CD is Cole Porter's *In the Still of the Night* from the 1937 film, "Rosalie" starring Nelson Eddy. As this is one of Porter's most recorded songs, we searched for something original to say by playing it. We wanted to keep it as quiet as possible until the soul-searing climax. Space in this case was more important than the notes which were played. Having heard many instrumental and vocal renderings I think ours owes most to a version recorded by one of my favorite singers, Helen Merrill (who many felt was the female embodiment of Mel Torme, vocally).

We move from hesitant hope to lush languish in our tribute to the south, *Stars Fell on Alabama*. As all of the renderings on this CD are instrumental, you should take a moment to search out the lyrics that Mitchell Parish wedded to Frank Perkins' melody. The words are completely free of Southern cliché, yet one feels the balmy breeze and romantic aura brought on by the surroundings. Good instrumentalists hear the words as they play, and I know Anne had them in her mind as she warbled this one. This tune was also a favorite of Jack Teagarden's; he used it as a theme song for a good portion of his career.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's modern classic "The Phantom of the Opera" was simultaneously the #1 hit on both New York City's Broadway and London's West End: the first musical to accomplish this. The hypnotic aria *The Music of the Night* allows Anne to "go diva," which she does with gusto. It is hard to believe that this musical is 25 years old now. I saw it as a high-school student on Broadway and will never forget the experience. If you have a chandelier in your home, move out from under it while listening to this track!

To change the style, we give *The Night Has A Thousand Eyes* a Beguine feel and loosen things up a bit. This lively song first appeared in a forgettable film of the same

name from 1948. Bobby Vee had the hit in 1963. The song is an unusual length of 48 bars, with a coda on the final chorus to add on 4 more bars. We have fun trading back and forth on this one.

Bill Evans and Gene Lees must have been in an extremely dark place when they conjured up *Turn Out the Stars*. The repetitive opening four-note phrase haunts the piece throughout. Anne darkens her tone and, again, we find that the space we leave between the notes to be as important as the notes themselves.

We needed to follow the emptiness of the previous track with one of unadulterated, heart-on-the-sleeve, joyous LOVE. The incredibly moving *Tender is the Night* seemed the perfect choice. The gorgeous melody was provided by famous tunesmith Sammy Fain for the 1962 film of the same name and popularized by Tony Bennett. Anne and I discovered the sheet music at the home of Tom and Barbara Hazzard, founders of the annual Sun Valley Jazz Jubilee. Although Tom is gone, I know that the love that he and Barbara shared could be given no better voice than the melody of this song.

For years people have been asking us to perform another song with Anne playing into the grand piano, creating a sympathetic vibration between the piano strings and the flute. At long last, we found the song that would be effective: Don McLean's love song to Vincent Van Gogh even provided the title of our CD. His *Vincent* (with the subtitle *Starry, Starry Night*) was one of my favorite songs in high school. The pentatonic motif rings beautifully as Anne plays into the piano. This song has just a nine-note range and possesses only one chromatic note. Yet it is the most expressive homage I have encountered from one artist to another.

The vintage love song *Stairway to the Stars* provides us with a final encounter with our hero Mitchell Parish, whose lyrics, though they do not appear on this recording, are perfectly married to every tune in which he was ever involved. Here his composers are jazzmen Matt Malneck and Frank Signorelli. The tune is sumptuous and the chords are rich as one might expect. I play a full piano style here in tribute to the pianists of the 1930's.

We all have magic moments that have been etched into our minds and hearts of first love. Almost invariably, soft nights and pretty stars accompany that love. Lerner and Loewe gave their heroine Eliza Doolittle the quintessential anthem to the frenzy of first love and we finish our musical trip through the stars and into the night with that epitome of optimism and youth *I Could Have Dance All Night*. Come to think of it, go into the arms of someone you love, hold them close and dance all night to this CD, our collection of songs as deep as the night and as bright as the stars. Many thanks, as always, for listening to the music we love to make.

Jeff Barnhart-April 20, 2011
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