

Barbara Hendricks Sings Gershwin (1981)

Written by bluesever

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- 01 *The man I love*
- 02 *They can't take that away from me*
- 03 *Medley, (Our) Love is here to stay*
- 04 *But not for me*
- 05 *Embraceable you*
- 06 *Nice work if you can get it*
- 07 *I got rhythm*
- 08 *Summertime*
- 09 *Has anyone seen Joe*
- 10 *I loves you, Porgy*

Barbara Hendricks - soprano Katia and Marielle Labeque - piano

Somebody hit upon an unexpected and in the event very welcome follow-up to the Labéque sisters' dazzling LP of Gershwin's Piano Concerto and Rhapsody in Blue (Philips 9500 917, 6/81). Barbara Hendricks, whom I last met in Tredeci's uncommonly futile Final Alice (Decca digital SXDL7516, 8/81), has not been much associated with music like this, although she was a fine Clara in Maazel's recording of Porgy and Bess (Decca SET609-1 1, 4/76). Her voice is beautiful, yet, intensely enjoyable though these performances are, she does not sing the songs quite as to the manner born; her interpretations often sound, in fact, rather studied, and although I do not unduly object to this, greater relaxation and apparent casualness would have been beneficial.

Gershwin's melodies are treated very freely, and it would be helpful to know which, if any, of the alterations, extensions, variations, etc. stem from the performers. Unfortunately, I have not seen the sleeve-note which accompanies this record, but I understand that the highly imaginative

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arrangements, which amount, as it were to elaborate commentaries on Gershwin's texts, were written by François Jeanneau, a quite well-known French jazz musician with several interesting LPs to his credit. Perhaps most of the luxuriant detail of these performances is of his invention. The keyboard parts, anyway, are played with exhilarating zest and at times it seems as if Miss Hendricks is afloat on a pianistic flood, even, in / got rhythm, a tidal wave. And everything is recorded with a razor-sharp clarity.

The stereo disposition, with the pianists one on each side and the singer in the middle, is obvious yet effective, as when the voice is inserted between the antiphonal exchanges which begin *Our love is here to stay*. On each piece a network is spun in which the vocal line is only one part, But not for me being a good example, and there are also adventurous keyboard interludes and in some cases mood-changing links between the songs. Much of the fun arises from the fact, also, that the accompaniments-a thoroughly inadequate word in the circumstances-are so different from the usual melody-hugging light music treatments, so disjunct and freely contrapuntal. Probably "Has anyone seen Joe?", from *Blue Monday*, Gershwin's first large-scale work (1922), receives the most elaborate treatment, although "I loves you, Porgy" is perhaps the most beautiful, with the tender, withdrawn account of *Embraceable you* a close second. The chief melodic idea of the *Blue Monday* piece, incidentally, is also met with in Gershwin's *Lullaby* for string quartet. -- M.H., Gramophone [12/1981], arkivmusic.com

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