Madeleine Peyroux – Bare Bones (2009)

01. Instead 02. Bare Bones 03. Damn the Circumstances 04. River of Tears 05. You Can't Do Me 06. Love and Treachery 07. Our Lady of Pigalle 08. Homeless Happiness 09. To Love You All Over Again 10. I Must Be Saved 11. Somethin' Grand Musicians: Madeleine Peyroux — Vocals, Acoustic guitar Larry Klein — Bass, Producer Vinnie Colaiuta — Drums Dean Parks — Electric guitar Jim Beard — Piano Larry Goldings — Hammond Organ, Estey Organ Carla Kihlstedt — Violin Luciana Souza — Backing vocals Rebecca Pidgeon — Backing vocals

Madeleine Peyroux's fourth album isn't the normal mix of standards (contemporary or traditional) with a few songs of her own composing; each of the 11 tracks is a new song written by Peyroux, usually in tandem with producer Larry Klein or a guest. Still, she appears in her usual relaxed setting, with a small group perfectly poised to translate her languorous vocals into perfect accompaniment -- organist Larry Goldings, pianist Jim Beard, drummer Vinnie Colaiuta, plus producer Klein on bass, Dean Parks on guitar, and Carla Kihlstedt on violin. Fans of vocal jazz may be disappointed to see that all the songs are new ones -- many a great conversation could consist solely of the standards she should perform -- but they may regret the disappointment. Peyroux is not only a great interpreter of songs, she also knows how to write in what might be called the old-fashioned way, the type of song with a universal, direct, emotional power that became a rarity during the late 20th century. Also, the help she gets from her co-writers -- Walter Becker of Steely Dan, Klein, and friend Julian Coryell -- is priceless. Becker delivers a pair of special gems, including the title track and a song called "You Can't Do Me" that delivers the priceless cutting wit he perfected with Steely Dan (a sample: "You know I get so blue and I go/Down like a deep sea diver, out like a Coltrane tenor man.../Blewed like a Mississippi sharecropper, screwed like a high-school cheerleader"). Granted, Peyroux faces an uphill climb by delivering new songs in the same musical context that most listeners hear standards; after all, comparisons to the half-century of American popular song aren't fair, but they certainly come easy. Still, Bare Bones is a remarkable work from one of the best artists in vocal jazz. ---John Bush, Rovi

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