

Dessy Di Lauro – This Is Neo-Ragtime (2013)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Hep Rag (Introlude)* 2. *Mysterious* 3. *Jump 'n' Jivin'* 4. *Popularity Contest* 5. *Loved* 6. *Lost in the Jungle* 7. *Sweet Georgia Brown (feat. Anon)* 8. *Why U Raggin'?* 9. *Bringin' It Back (feat. Anon)* 10. *Never Existed*

The Harlem Renaissance was one of the most dynamic periods of the Roaring Twenties and Thirties, an era that exploded with the ragtime stride piano, swing bands and plenty of hot dance crazes. Those days are fondly remembered in the past few decades with the dazzling production of *Ain't Misbehavin'*, a revue that still tours throughout the U.S. celebrating black musicians like Fats Waller and Cab Calloway, who were the heartbeat of the Harlem Renaissance.

Today, two musicians are recapturing those golden days in a completely different musical fashion. The first, DJ/producer Parov Stelar, created a hybrid electro/ragtime/swing soundtrack that was the backdrop for a recent TV commercial. The other, singer/songwriter Dessy Di Lauro, has a jazz background that has motivated and afforded her the skills and experience needed to visualize a modern urban perspective of the Harlem Renaissance.

In 2011, Di Lauro's *Jump 'n' Jivin' Live @ the Swing House* EP introduced audiences to *Hep Rag*, a tasty helping of R&B and hip-hop that basks in the jazzy rhythms and attitudes that made the Harlem Renaissance a lively cultural experience. This is *Neo Ragtime*, Di Lauro's latest release and first full-length project, is perfectly timed to honor the Harlem Renaissance during Black History Month. Producer/musician Ric'key Pageot's syncopated, funk-invested orchestrations are the backdrop for DiLauro's deeply personal thoughts on integrity in relationships, love and social issues.

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Di Lauro hits her stride on This is Neo Ragtime when she fully bares her soul, which is the norm for most of this Crazyglue Music release. The lying boyfriend is given the heave-ho on “Mysterious,” with its classic “You got’s to go” lyric. The first single, “Why U Raggin’,” finds Di Lauro calling more people out on their character, while the music industry is placed on notice for running a “Popularity Contest.” “Lost in the Jungle” switches up from the cool swinging brass section in the first half to a thrilling gospel-like climax: “Sometimes we get lost in our fears/We don’t know which way to turn.”

The pop/jazz standard “Sweet Georgia Brown” is a bit weighed down with the lackadaisical hip-hop underlining, but Di Lauro sprinkles enough gusto on top of Pageot’s sweet accordion hooks. However, her usually dependable vocal passion is sometimes uneven on “Never Existed.” Thankfully, “Bringin’ It Back” peppers old-school Harlem with reggae flavor, absolutely bringing Neo Ragtime back to Di Lauro’s performance zeal as she pays respect for the music of the past: “I’ll never be the one to give up my integrity/Making the music I love and singing wholeheartedly.”

Di Lauro and Pageot’s foresight on This is Neo Ragtime in revisiting the golden days of The Harlem Renaissance with some modern-day urban touches turns out to be a very favorable musical marriage. The hardcore R&B and hip-hop fans who check out This is Neo Ragtime will also receive an invaluable black history lesson in the process. Recommended. --- Peggy Oliver, cdbaby.com

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