Stacey Kent - The Boy Next Door (2003)



1. The Best Is Yet To Come
2. The Boy Next Door
3. The Trolley Song
4. Say It Isn't So
5. Too Darn Hot
6. Makin' Whoopee
7. What The World Needs Now Is Love
8. You've Got A Friend
9. I Got It Bad
10. Ooh-Shoo-Be-Doo-Bee
11. People Will Say We're In Love
12. 'Tis Autumn
13. All I Do Is Dream Of You
14. I Get Along Without You Very Well
15. You're The Top
16. Bookends
Personnel: Stacey Kent (vocals); Colin Oxley (guitar); Jim Tomlinson (saxophone, background vocals); David Newton (piano, keyboards, background vocals); Dave Chamberlain (double bass); Matt Home (drums); Curtis Schwartz (background vocals).

Stacey Kent is in love with words. She's pretty fond of melody, too. But her heart belongs to a good lyric, and when the words are right, her swinging jazz quartet is there to reimagine the tune, if necessary. On The Boy Next Door, Kent pays tribute to her heroes, most of whom made their mark singing the Great American Songbook, popular standards written by the likes of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, and the Gershwins, along with a few contemporary additions.

If Kent's voice is girlish, her persona is that of a woman who may sound young, but has been around for a few years. She holds the microphone closely and caresses each word, wringing poignancy and knowingness from each syllable, landing crisply on consonants. On the recording of Berlin's "Say It Isn't So," she implores her lover to come clean, directly and painfully.

In live performance at the Oak Room of the Algonquin Hotel in September (the first Friday of a month-long run), she carefully delivered each plea for the truth with conversational matter-of-factness. Jim Tomlinson's sax offered reassurance in warm, breathy, Ben Webster-esque lines. She may not have believed him, but she looked as if she wanted to.

Part two of this story might be found in "What the World Needs Now," a late addition to the songbook by Burt Bacharach and Hal David, which Kent rescues from American Idol-schlock with good taste and understated piano accompaniment. Live, Kent's vulnerability in this song was as clear as her enunciation.

All is not melancholy, however. Kent is arguably more comfortable with songs that give wisdom the advantage over the wants of her heart. "Makin' Whoopee," inspired by the Ray Charles/Betty Carter duet, is a clever, cautionary tale for couples whose love nests might tatter as the years go by. "Too Darn Hot," spurred by Colin Oxley's percolating guitar, is sung from the point of view of someone who has experienced first-hand how the level of heat outdoors can influence the heat generated indoors. And Dizzy Gillespie's jive "Ooh-Shoo-Be-Doo-Bee" is an infectious course on how to say "I love you" at least two different ways. In the Oak Room, it was playfully sexy.

The record concludes with "Bookends," by Paul Simon, who recommends we "preserve our memories." Stacey Kent remembers the days when nuance, wit, and humor were in style, and with like-minded musicians, careful song choice, impeccable time, and unaffected phrasing, she'll help bring them back. ---Jeff Stockton, allaboutjazz.com

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