

John Pizzarelli - Midnight McCartney (2015)

Written by bluesever

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1 Silly Love Songs 2 My Love 3 Heart of the Country 4 Coming Up 5 No More Lonely Nights 6 Warm and Beautiful 7 Hi, Hi, Hi 8 Junk 9 My Valentine 10 Let 'Em In 11 Some People Never Know 12 Maybe I m Amazed 13 Wonderful Christmastime Harry Allen Sax (Tenor), Soliste Hélio Alves Piano Chris Cardona Viola Duduka Dafonseca Drums, Percussion Katherine Fink Flute (Alto) Andy Fusco Sax (Alto) Larry Goldings Arranger, Organ, Piano Tony Kadleck Trumpet Kevin Kanner Drums Michael McDonald Vocals Jessica Molaskey Vocals (Background) John Mosca Trombone Mairi Dorman Phaneuf Cello Bucky Pizzarelli Guitar (Rhythm), Soloist John Pizzarelli Arranger, Guitar, Vocals, Vocals (Background) Madeleine Pizzarelli Vocals (Background) Martin Pizzarelli Bass Don Sebesky Orchestration Pamela Sklar Flute (Alto) Paul Woodiel Violin Robin Zeh Violin

Paul McCartney had a great idea for an album. He just needed John Pizzarelli to make it. On September 11th, Concord Records will release Midnight McCartney. I got an idea in my head, McCartney wrote to Pizzarelli in late May 2014. "It might be interesting for you and Bucky to do a few of my songs that are lesser known than some of the others. I realize this may be a little immodest, if not pushy. I imagine the songs would include post-Beatles melodies of mine like 'Love in the Open Air' (from the soundtrack to 1967 film The Family Way), 'Junk,' 'Warm and Beautiful' and, possibly, 'My Valentine.'"

"My Valentine" was the one McCartney composition on his album of songs from the '30s and '40s, Kisses on the Bottom (MPL/Hear Music/Concord). Pizzarelli played guitar on the album and backed Sir Paul on a handful of prestigious live performances, including the GRAMMY Awards, MusiCares Person of the Year gala and the initial iTunes/Apple TV live broadcast. McCartney concluded in his letter, "The attraction for me is lesser-known tunes done in a mellow jazz style and, if it gets some traction, maybe the album could be titled Midnight McCartney. As I said, this may tickle your fancy or you may decide these are the ramblings of a deranged composer with too much time on his hands."

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To say John Pizzarelli was tickled is putting it mildly. Pizzarelli, his wife Jessica Molaskey co-producer of Midnight McCartney - and pianist Larry Goldings immediately went into research mode, digging through McCartney's albums of the last 45-plus years to find songs that could be re-harmonized and adapted for Pizzarelli's trademark style. The beauty of the project was having a lot of time to sit and listen to these things and make sure it was right, Pizzarelli says. "There were a lot of things we had never done before a lot of background vocals, additional horns and handclaps. That really made it into something."

And like most Pizzarelli records, it's a family affair: wife Jessica Molaskey co-produced the album and provides background vocals; John's father Bucky adds rhythm guitar on several tracks and a stunning solo on "Junk"; brother Martin is on bass throughout; and teenage daughter Madeline got into the act, transcribing "Warm and Beautiful" for her father to sing in a different key. "We're McCartney fans and this is our way of letting people know these are good songs", he says. "It's a take on the songs within a style we're comfortable with. If one became a hit, we'd be fine with playing it for the next 20 years." ---Editorial Reviews, amazon.com

John Pizzarelli lays it all out in the title of his 2015 album: this tribute to Paul McCartney is designed for play in the smoky late-night hours, when everything turns sweet and mellow. Furthermore, this is a tribute to McCartney, not the Beatles. There isn't a Fab song to be found here, as Pizzarelli focuses entirely on Paul's solo work (for these intents and purposes, this includes Wings records), concentrating on the '70s but also sliding McCartney's Great American Songbook wannabe "My Valentine" into the mix. Pizzarelli digs up a few other obscurities -- the early Wings song "Some People Never Know," the Speed of Sound deep cut "Warm and Beautiful" -- and he also plays around with expectations, making "Let 'Em In" swing like mad and relaxing "Hi Hi Hi" so it doesn't rock, it grooves. He also invites Michael McDonald to sing on "Coming Up," which swaggers like Sinatra in Vegas, but for as delightful as that is, the key to the record's success is Pizzarelli himself, who delivers upon the laid-back promise of the title but is savvier than he needed to be, which is why Midnight McCartney satisfies. ---Stephen Thomas Erlewine, AllMusic Review

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