

Sara Gazarek - Yours (2005)

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01. *My Shining Hour* (3:13) 02. *Yours* (4:03) 03. *Amazing* (5:12) 04. *Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye* (3:41) 05. *Cheek to Cheek* (3:58) 06. *You Got By* (4:27) 07. *Blackbird/Bye Bye Blackbird* (5:55) 08. *The Circle Game* (5:07) 09. *All or Nothing at All* (6:53) 10. *Too Young to Go Steady* (5:00) 11. *You Are My Sunshine* (3:35) Musicians: Sara Gazarek – vocals Josh Nelson – piano Erik Kertes - acoustic bass Matt Slocum – drums

It's commonplace for young vocalists to do an album of standards when debuting on the jazz scene. What sets them apart is how they present these songs, which have been done many times over by both veterans and newcomers. Some who have succeeded are Jane Monheit, Michael Bublé, and Renee Olstead. Sara Gazarek, 23, has joined their ranks. Early indications are she will succeed—provided she doesn't just do covers, but present them in a way that sets her apart from the others.

Gazarek has performed with Oleta Adams, Karrin Allyson, and Diane Schuur as the "yet undiscovered talent at the Concord Jazz Festival. Other artists she's played with or studied under include Barry Manilow and Tierney Sutton.

Yours is a mix of jazz standards, pop/rock covers, and original songs. Gazarek is backed by pianist Joshua Nelson, bassist Erik Kertes, and drummer Matt Slocum. Nelson wrote the title song and "Amazing, two charming pieces that may help Gazarak distinguish herself. She does justice to the standards, of course, but how many versions of "My Shining Hour and "Cheek to Cheek can jazz listeners stand before saying "Enough! ? Both are nicely done, of course. In fact, Nelson's piano solo and Gazarek's scatting at the end turn "Cheek to Cheek from just another cover to something delightful. While this rendering doesn't strengthen the album, it doesn't hurt it either.

The ensemble gets a bit more creative with the medley "Blackbird/Bye Bye Blackbird, seamlessly weaving the Beatles' hit with the Mort Dixon-Ray Henderson composition. The first portion opens with Kertes' bowed bass and Gazarek's wordless vocal, backed by Nelson. The title song, penned by Nelson, is a charming ballad. Kertes gets a moment to shine with a brief bass solo, but the singer's voice is what carries this tune. Gazarek is a light alto, cut from the same fabric as such vocalists as Corinne Drewery of Swing Out Sister and Christine McVie of Fleetwood Mac.

This characteristic comes through on Nelson's "Amazing, demonstrating that this quartet's original work will help it break from the pack. "You Got By, co-written by Gazarek and Kertes, is another charmer. Gazarek demonstrates her range, smoothly reaching a crescendo while crisply striking a couple of high notes during one of the more dramatic moments. Then, after Nelson's brief solo, she comes back down to normal level with a sassy, Janis Siegel-esque interlude before closing the song with the main melody.

While the covers of the jazz standards aren't strong enough to attract the listener who might otherwise miss this album, they are good enough to support the other material. The original songs, and Gazarek's voice, are what make this recording special. ---Woodrow Wilkins, allaboutjazz.com

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