

Sara Gazarek – Thirsty Ghost (2019)

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1 *Lonely Hours* 5:59 2 *Never Will I Marry* 3:49 3 *I'm Not The Only One* 4:49 4 *Easy Love* 4:20 5 *I Get Along Without You Very Well* 5:44 6 *I Believe When I Fall In Love* 5:44 7 *Jolene* 4:35 8 *Gaslight District* 5:30 9 *The River/River Man* 7:01 10 *Intro: Chrysalis* 0:33 11 *Cocoon* 5:54 12 *Distant Storm* 6:14 13 *Spinning Round* 4:45 Alto Saxophone – Danny Janklow (tracks: 7), Josh Johnson (tracks: 1 to 3, 5, 8, 10, 11) Backing Vocals – Erin Bentlage (tracks: 3, 5, 7, 11), Michael Mayo (tracks: 3, 5) Bass – Alex Boneham Bass Clarinet – Brian Walsh (tracks: 2, 3, 5, 7, 8) Drums – Christian Euman (tracks: 1 to 8, 10, 11) Electric Piano [Rhodes] – Stu Mindeman (tracks: 2, 3, 8, 10) Organ – Larry Goldings (tracks: 7) Percussion – Aaron Serfaty (tracks: 5), Keita Ogawa (tracks: 2) Piano – Stu Mindeman (tracks: 1, 4 to 7, 11) Trombone – Ido Meshulam (tracks: 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11) Vocals – Sara Gazarek Vocals [Special Guest] – Kurt Elling (tracks: 11)

Sara Gazarek has been working as a professional jazz singer since 2004. You can find plenty of vintage YouTube clips of her singing Great American Songbook material in a breezy, polished manner. A few years ago, things began to happen in her life. There was near-death tragedy in her family, her marriage fell apart and she began to wonder about her professional future. On this, her sixth album, her reactions to all this have resulted in a broadening and deepening of her art. She sings here with a new-found power and earnestness and draws her repertoire from a wide array of sources including Stevie Wonder, Nick Drake and her own writing.

The music on the set includes funky fusion tracks, acoustic ballads and hybrids of differing styles. Hoagy Carmichael's "I Get Along Without You Very Well" gets a simple treatment with wistful voice against a piano trio while Frank Loesser's "Never Will I Marry" is buoyed by a bubbly African rhythm. Cuts like "I'm Not The Only One" and Stevie Wonder's "I Believe When I Fall In Love" have plush electric funk or soul backing and are brought to life through the earnest humanity of Gazarek's singing. She shows a more subtle sensuality on "Easy Love," cooing over sophisticated jazz-pop led by Larry Goldings' organ and Stu Mindeman's piano. The drama really comes out in Dolly Parton's classic country ballad, "Jolene." Over a turbulent rumble of

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piano and drums, Gazarek's voice starts out intense and gets harder and angrier as the song goes on. By the end she is practically screaming at Jolene to keep away from her man.

Over its last few tracks, the CD takes a more philosophical turn. "Gaslight District" is a calming combination of jazz and folk impulses with Gazarek's vocal supported by sensitive reeds. The horn section also provides a soothing backdrop to her singing of a Sara Teasdale poem "The River" which segues into Nick Drake's magical "River Man" sung over a gently rocking electric piano. Bjork's typically dreamlike "Cocoon" allows Gazarek to stretch her voice in a weightless atmosphere surrounded by softly pulsing bass and percussion and ghostly electric piano. Finally she sings her own words over the open sky landscapes of Brad Mehldau's composition, "Distant Storm," her voice firm with quiet conviction as she climbs through the folk-tinged melody with help from a rich alto solo by Josh Johnson and an elegant vocal interlude by her friend and mentor, Kurt Elling.

This is the finest music of Sara Gazarek's career to date. Her voice is still glossy and polished but now it also has purpose and maturity. She sounds like a woman who has faced challenges and survived. The music on these tracks goes in several different directions but the depth and honesty of Gazarek's singing ties them all together. As the picture on the CD cover suggests, this work comes directly from her heart. ---Jerome Wilson, allaboutjazz.com

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