

Helen Carr – ...Down In The Depths On The 90th Floor (1955)

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1. Not Mine 2. I Don't Want To Cry Anymore 3. Tulip Or Turnip 4. Memory Of The Rain 5. Down In The Depths Of The 90th Floor 6. You're Driving Me Crazy 7. I'm Glad There Is You 8. Moments Like This Charlie Mariano - Alto Saxophone Don Fagerquist - Trumpet Helen Carr - Vocals Max Bennett - Bass Donn Trenner - Piano Stan Levy - Drums

An overlooked vocalist inspired by Billie Holiday, Helen Carr never had time to make her mark on the history of jazz music during her short-lived career. Before her death at the age of 38 she only recorded two albums. One of the darkest vocal jazz albums of the 50s - packaged with a great title and cover image that features a lone lit window in a New York skyscraper! Helen has incredible backing on the record - a small combo that includes Charlie Mariano on alto sax, Don Fagerquist on trumpet, and Donn Trenner on piano - all gently sliding in behind Carr's blue vocals in a way that's similar to some of the Chris Connor work on Bethlehem from the same time. ---sacdr.net

She only recorded two albums. She may or may not have died in a car accident. Her year of birth is up for grabs. Who is Helen Carr?

It's a mystery, or at least a mystery in terms of digging up information about her on the Internet. She was born in Utah in 1924, or perhaps 1922, and once her career took off, she fronted for a number of big bands, including Stan Kenton and Charlie Barnett. Her voice is breathy and distinctive, and while some liken her to Billie Holiday, I think a sharp-toned Blossom Dearie is a much closer match if we're going for comparisons.

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Yet why compare? She has her own sound, one that never quite comes at you directly, but sneaks up on you sideways and around corners. Her first - or was it her second? - LP, 1955's "Down In The Depths Of The 90th Floor" is also noteworthy because her set, including "Tulip or Turnip" and "I Don't Want To Cry Anymore" haven't all been done to death. Everything about it feels fresh. Adding to the mystery of Helen is the fact that she never reveals her face on her LP covers, including 1955's (or 1956's?) "Why Do I Love You" - a Cheerfully Heavenly Helen Exclusive! - which features two models (I'm assuming) making out on the beach. This version's been remastered, yet what makes it truly stand out, again, are the off-the-beaten-track song selections and Helen's gorgeous vocals, which can turn hot or cool on a dime.

Helen died in 1960, either in a car accident or due to breast cancer, leaving behind her husband, pianist/arranger Donn Trenner (who's still kinkin' at age 90). They even wrote a song together, "Memory Of The Rain," which is featured on "90th Floor." Treasure these two LPs, because that's all there is. ---thecheerfulearfull.blogspot.com

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