

Kari Kirkland – Wild Is the Wind (2021)

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1 It's Alright With Me 2 It's Probably Me 3 Break Your Heart 4 Too Late Now 5 Wild Is The Wind 6 Steamroller Blues 7 Too Close For Comfort 8 Secret 9 Everybody Wants To Rule The World 10 I'll Be Around Kevin Axt - Acoustic and Electric Bass Shelly Berg - Piano, Electric Piano, and Organ John Daversa - Trumpet Gregg Field - Drums Roy Hargrove - Trumpet, Flugelhorn Brian Kilgore - Percussion Kari Kirkland - Vocals Dean Parks - Acoustic and Electric Guitar Budapest Sessions Orchestra - Strings

Kari's debut album, *Wild is the Wind*, arranged and produced by four-time Grammy nominee, Shelly Berg, is a collection of contemporary songs and jazz standards that have more in common than one might notice at first glance. She explains, "The majority of tracks are about unrequited or forbidden love. To me, this kind of love is rooted in pain. It's easy to access the idea of pain, but more difficult to authentically express it. Shelly encouraged me to really get inside the lyrics of each song, and bring the stories to life". Kari's deep admiration of Nancy Wilson, Eva Cassidy, and Julie London are reflected both in her tone and phrasing on the album. Berg's feelings about his decision to work with Kari speak to the talents of this newcomer to the jazz scene. "Kari's voice and style are uniquely 'her,'" he says. "There is a depth of truth and heart in her singing that is very, very compelling. I'm proud and blessed to have done this project with her." ---karikirkland.com

Having served as a private chef, flying trapeze artist, and regisseur of enterprising circus shows, Kari Kirkland can rightly be classified as an itinerant creative. But she's no dabbler, and it's important to make that distinction. With each stop along her winding road Kirkland has dedicated herself to learning the ropes, and it's no different with the one pursuit that's actually been something of a constant in her life: Kirkland's parents were both working musicians, and

the aforementioned career choices have essentially been detours on her walk down that lane. Now, with the release of her debut as a singer, she realizes part of a lasting ambition.

Proving wise from the start by tapping Shelly Berg as arranger, pianist, and co-producer, Kirkland captivates with a blend of sultry-voiced self-assurance and vulnerability. Whether putting an alluring finish over Steely Dan's "Do It Again," expressing serious yearning during Labrinth's "Jealous," or heating up a joint like James Taylor's "Steamroller Blues," she always commits. Her brushes with more traditional jazz fare work equally well; she has her way with a riff-rooted "It's All Right with Me" and rounds out some edges on a mellow "Too Close for Comfort."

Although Kirkland shines, those who built her settings deserve near-equal credit. Berg delivers a masterclass on arranging and performing, with subtlety and surprise at his fingertips; the core that joins him—guitarist Dean Parks, bassist Kevin Axt, and drummer Gregg Field—defines good taste; and guest appearances from the Budapest Sessions Orchestra, percussionist Brian Kilgore, and two renowned trumpeters (John Daversa on "Do It Again," the late Roy Hargrove on "Too Late Now") embellish the music. Keeping good company while artfully walking the line where jazz and adult contemporary meet, Kari Kirkland proves that she's finally right where she belongs. ---Dan Bilawsky, jazztimes.com

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