

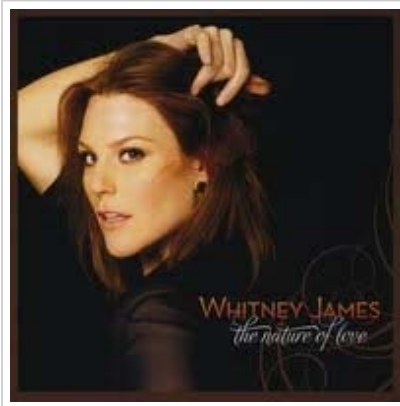
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STEP TEMPEST

JAZZ PIQUES MY INTEREST AND TOUCHES NEARLY EVERY ASPECT OF MY LIFE. AFTER YEARS OF REVIEWING FOR CADENCE MAGAZINE AND THE HARTFORD COURANT, I'M ON MY OWN.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 2010

Ladies' Day (Part 2)



The Nature of Love - Whitney James

(Damsselfly Productions) -

The past half-decade has brought a surfeit of female vocalists on the jazz scene, many of them performing standards. For her debut CD, Whitney James delves into that very "standards" pool and comes up with a winning

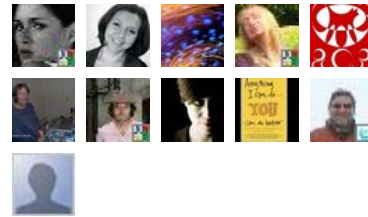
program. Why? Well, she has a splendid voice and she fully inhabits her material. Rarely stretching a tune for the sake of multiple solos, Ms. James still allows her band a lot of freedom. The rhythm section of **Matt Clohesy** (bass) and **Jon Wikan** (drums, percussion) are in sync with James' vocal movements while pianist **Joshua Wolff** is solid throughout. **Ingrid Jensen** (trumpet, flugelhorn) appears on 5 of the 9 tracks, displaying her impressive range and melodic invention. James, a student of Jay Clayton, allows the pieces to breathe, is an articulate vocalist (her alto voice is pleasingly in its lower range) and she does not flaunt her technique. There are probably a thousand or more versions of "*The Very Thought of You*" yet there is so much to enjoy about this rendering, from the shifting rhythms to Wolff's sparkling solo to Jensen's mellow flugelhorn to the sweet yet mature vocal. Listen to the inventive intro on "*How Deep Is the Ocean*", how Wikan's drums dance over the bouncing riffs and then the movement in and out of the "swing" section, complete with Ms. Jensen riffing around behind the vocal. The lovely ballad, "*Be Anything (But Be Mine)*", written in 1952 by Irving Gordon (best known for "*Unforgettable*"), features just voice and piano - Ms. James uses space smartly, never rushing the pace and always caressing the lyrics.

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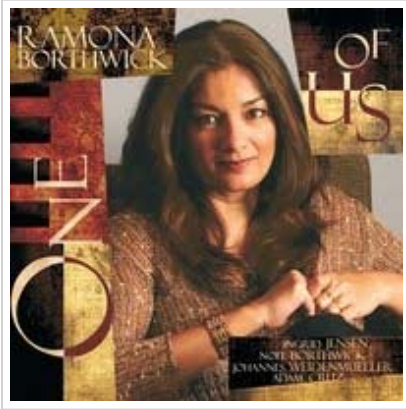
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Nothing sounds forced or phony, every track is worth repeated listens, and the musicianship impeccable. Whitney James has made a fine debut CD and makes one year to see and hear her in a live setting. To find out more, go to www.whitneyjames.com.



***One of Us* - Ramona Borthwick (Leitmotif) -**

"Who's Your Mama"

opens this recording, with the trumpet of **Ingrid Jensen** intoning the notes to NPR's "All Things Considered" before the band takes the piece on a romp. It's a fitting and joyful beginning to the program, pianist/composer/vocalist

Borthwick's second release as a leader. She's a fine player, displaying a style that has its roots in mainstream jazz. Her solos are often lyrical (listen to the beauty and strength of the title track) and she can really dig into her phrases. Her wordless vocals add yet another color to several of the tracks, mixing well with the guitar and trumpet or flugelhorn. One hears the influences of Pat Metheny and McCoy Tyner in many of these pieces (and Herbie Hancock in several of the solos.) Her compositions are smartly constructed, with the rhythm section of **Johannes Weidenmueller** (bass) and **Adam Cruz** (drums) really pushing the pieces along.

Producer/guitarist/husband **Noel Borthwick** allows the music to breathe (the mix is clear, not cluttered), adding his crisply played guitar lines to many of the 10 tracks (I especially like his acoustic rhythm work at the outset of "**Rio Alegre**", the CD's final track.) Ms. Jensen's work is pleasing throughout, whether she's swinging like mad (as she does on the afore-mentioned opening cut) or creating low guttural tones at the onset of "**Gaia**" - her solo later in the performance glides effortlessly over the sparkling rhythm section. "**Eight Winds**" opens with harp-like phrases and soon drops into a medium tempo swinger with a long, lilting, piano solo followed by a wonderful muted trumpet spot.

At over 70 minutes, "**One of Us**" is a bit too long (but, what to leave out?) yet still has much to recommend it. Ms. Borthwick's solo work, the active, responsive and sharp rhythm section and Ms. Jensen's contributions all add up to a good listening experience. To find out more, go to www.ramonaborthwick.com.

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