

Roberta Piket/One for Marian

Almost twenty years ago, in the notes to her first recording as a leader, Roberta Piket declared, wisely, “I think the best tribute you can make to the masters of the past is not to try to imitate them, but to do something to push the music forward, to do something original, as they did.” And so, rather than playing Marian McPartland’s compositions in a trio format, as Marian usually did, Roberta has chosen an intimate sextet that offers her an array of sonorities and textures that can be, as she puts it, “teased out,” blended and orchestrated to create something fresh, to reveal a different dimension, in the pieces.

In this vein Roberta employs open fourth voicings by trumpet, tenor saxophone, and flute to establish a haunting, almost mysterious atmosphere on Marian’s well-titled **Ambiance**. For his solo Steve Wilson switches from flute to alto saxophone, followed by Roberta, dancing lightly over the insistent polyrhythms set down by Harvie S’s bass and Billy Mintz’s drums.

Roberta’s original, **One for Marian**, is a swinger, melodically complex and rhythmically fluid, and so, a worthy tribute to the multifaceted, profound personality that was Marian McPartland. Brief, cogent solos by Virginia Mayhew on tenor saxophone, Roberta, and Steve, again on alto, fill out this dedication to a one-of-a-kind artist.

Roberta had performed Marian’s ballad, **In the Days of Our Love**, during her third appearance on McPartland’s long-running NPR series, *Piano Jazz*, and recorded it on her 2012 Thirteenth Note release, *Solo*. Here she revisits the lovely theme, making effective use of the colors she has added to her arranger’s palette, particularly Virginia’s clarinet. Trumpeter Bill Mobley, Virginia (on tenor), and Roberta solo thoughtfully over a lilting double-time feel before recapping the theme.

When he heard **Twilight World** – graced with a lyric by America’s true poet laureate, Johnny Mercer – Marian’s great friend, Tony Bennett, declared, "Well, that song will last forever." Karrin Allyson lends her voice to this very special performance. “It was a treat to play with Karrin Allyson for the first time,” Roberta declares. “The idea of a special duet between Karrin and myself came from producer Todd Barkan, just one of several examples of Todd's wisdom and experience that can be heard on this recording.”

“In 1995 when she heard I was about to record my first CD as a leader, *Unbroken Line*,” Roberta recalls, “Marian called to ask if I would consider recording one of her tunes. I was very pleased to tell her that I had already decided to record **Threnody**, which she'd written in memory of pianist-composer Mary Lou Williams.” Having already performed this delicate jazz waltz in a trio setting, here she revisits it with a quartet, as Steve Wilson “sings” Marian’s lilting melody on his flute.

Time and Time Again opens with just Virginia’s tenor over Billy Mintz’s conga drums. “I was after a ‘misterioso effect’ and so we played it much slower than Marian did, and added the conga,” offers Roberta. Bill’s trumpet takes up the theme at the bridge, and the saxophones join him in three-part harmony that Roberta, thanks to the Harmon-muted trumpet lead, colorfully calls “crunchy voicings.” Virginia solos with characteristic eloquence and warmth, and the rhythm section supports and inspires her as only longtime friends and frequent colleagues can. (A month after this session Roberta, Billy, and Harvie recorded a session led by Virginia.)

Saying Goodbye was not written for Marian, but Roberta played the tune the last time she appeared on *Piano Jazz* and Marian told her she liked it. As Roberta says, it “reflects a universal feeling of loss.” However, this performance is neither melancholy nor

solemn, but rather a joyful remembrance of someone who was loved and is still loved, and has gone on. Solos by Roberta, Harvie, and Bill evoke happy memories. And let credit be paid to drummer Billy Mintz, whose sensitive contributions are a vital element of every track, particularly here, where his subtle, supportive brush work is often more felt than heard.

A kaleidoscope, of course, is a cylinder with mirrors filled with loose, colored objects. You look into the tube while rotating it and those objects tumble to create ever-changing colors and patterns. Roberta's introduction to **Kaleidoscope**, which served Marian long and well as the theme song to *Piano Jazz*, seems to mimic that delightful process, and in their solos Steve, Bill, Roberta, and Billy reveal that the dominant color is a vivid blue.

"I can't say enough about the musicians on this CD," Roberta concludes. "Aside from being great ensemble players, they all played phenomenal solos – lyrical, inventive, soulful, and swinging." Add all of that to Roberta's inventive orchestrations, and the result is a most worthy celebration of an eminent artist and great friend.

Bob Bernotas, New York

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