



A WOMAN IN LOVE

BARBARA LEA



with Billy Taylor and his Trio / and Johnny Windhurst

There are a great many popular songs, old and new, that deal with the very basic human emotion known as love, with widely varying degrees of success. There are also a great many singers who, on a staggeringly large number of records, take a crack at such songs. Every once in a frighteningly long while the combination comes out exactly right. Singer, songs, accompaniment, and the way all these elements blend together into a single living, compelling unity—when it all comes out just right, the result is a moving and truly satisfying musical experience.

That's the way it is with this album of love songs by BARBARA LEA, an album that builds and holds a mood of rare warmth and beauty. It's like Bobby Thomson hitting that home run, or Jimmy Durante saying any one of the dozen or more lines he says perfectly, or like a Hemingway bullfighter making exactly the proper movement. It's *right*, that's all....

Barbara Lea is quite clearly a singer of skill and taste. She has picked out these songs—some of them moderately well-known, some quite obscure and none recorded often before (which is entirely a reflection on other singers' taste). All of them are about being in love and being happy or worried or sad about it. Barbara sings them as if she means every word and inflection (which is pretty close to being a lost art). And she succeeds in convincing the listener that it's all real, which is surely the way a song should be put across. This is what might be called "interpreting" a song, except that the word is usually taken to mean either something stuffy or else that the performer has chosen

to bend the melodic line and the lyrics all out of shape to suit his or her own purposes. But there is nothing even faintly stuffy going on here; and Barbara Lea plainly has enough faith in her own taste to figure that if she chooses a song it's apt to have enough merit to be treated pretty much as written and come out very effectively.

Barbara works with a voice that is warm, relaxed, sensitive and true. She is not a "perfect" singer (and there probably won't be one of those until someone whips up an electronic brain that can carry a tune), but she is a very good and very moving singer, which is undoubtedly better than being "perfect."

Not the least of the virtues of this LP is the perceptive backing provided by a group of highly skilled musicians. Billy Taylor is one of today's most brilliant jazz pianists; he has only rarely been heard as an accompanist, but he displays here a talent for handling that difficult assignment in inventive and consistently helpful fashion. The rhythm section also includes guitarist Jimmy Shirley, and Taylor's regular bass player and drummer, Earl May and Percy Brice, who have developed into a superbly meshed team during the course of many long and successful engagements. Johnny Windhurst is a young trumpeter of great strength and imagination, who has worked with a variety of jazz groups and who happens to have a distinctively personal style that refuses to be limited to any single jazz category. All five men provide a lilt where that is called for, tenderness when needed, and firm, integrated support at all times. Taylor and Windhurst also have their share of fine solo touches (listen particularly for Billy

on *I Didn't Know About You* and *As Long As I Live*; and Johnny on the latter tune and on *Woman Alone with the Blues*, where he takes what might be called the best tenor sax chorus ever played on a trumpet)..

It can all be fairly summed up by saying that this group provides a setting that any vocalist could be jealous of, and that Barbara Lea sings well enough to deserve nothing less than that.

—Orrin Keepnews

(Reprinted from the original Riverside RLP 2518 LP by permission of Mr. Orrin Keepnews and Fantasy Records.)

This re-release of my first album, plus four additional songs, is the fulfillment of a plan that began a long time ago.

In the mid-'50s (thanks to jazz photographer Bob Parent) I recorded eight sides for Riverside which were released to wonderful critical acclaim. The biggest thrill for me was waking up one Sunday morning to find myself on the front page of the New York Times Arts & Leisure section in a list of the nine "Best Popular Vocal LPs of 1955"—the only newcomer among the likes of Bing Crosby, Noel Coward, Sammy Davis, Jr. and *Oklahoma!*

But alas, the 12-inch LP was an idea whose time had come, and overnight 10-inch discs like mine were obsolete. We intended to add

four sides and reissue it in the suddenly obligatory 12-inch format, but somehow that didn't happen. I went on to record two albums for Prestige; these too were extremely well-received. but I always mourned a little over the fate of my firstborn. The 60s brought the tidal wave of doo-wop that engulfed music, followed by rock, folk, folk-rock, rock-folk and eventual con-fusion...I became an actress.

But miraculously, jazz resurfaced again and my own musical career resumed. The devotion and doggedness of jazz lovers had generated (or, maintained) a demand for such records as this. In 1978 I was delighted to be able to arrange for this release by Audiophile and to get together with Billy Taylor that October to do the four new tracks.

I don't think it's just sentiment that causes my great fondness for this record, though there is plenty of sentiment surrounding it. What I like is the music itself. In selecting the original eight tunes we decided to do only warm, happy love songs, cutting in half the painful process of selection and giving the album a unified tone. But we had to make an exception for Willard Robison's definitive torch song *A Woman Alone with the Blues* (recorded again on my first Audiophile album, "The Devil is Afraid of Music"). I remember we had trouble getting this one down to the very slow tempo I wanted until finally Bob Mantler said, "It's a dirge!" We settled down and Johnny Windhurst turned out a glorious bottom-register trumpet solo utilizing all but the lowest semitone of the range of the horn.

It is a great and all too rare pleasure to hear Johnny's opulent sound and his lefthanded lyricism, along with the marvelously melodic

inventions of Billy Taylor. Billy's beautifully-shaped 8-bar solo on the bridge of *I Didn't Know About You* is to me one of the high points of living. The art of accompanying semi-jazz singing is a most difficult one to master, requiring superb musicianship and the ability to see around corners, along with the sense of proportion to know what not to play and the personal security not to play it.

Billy Taylor had never recorded with a singer before, but his sensitivity and generosity were abundantly clear. He was soon in such demand that he had to stop accompanying singers altogether to avoid swamping his own career. I am delighted that he made himself available for the additional four tunes and I found that his melodic spinning ability had not diminished (dig *Too Late Now*).

The four songs added are among the last that were with deep regret eliminated from the original list—in fact, I've been feeling guilty about them for years. They're all simply wonderful; *I See Your Face Before Me* has the most fascinating and mysterious melody since the *Allegretto* of Beethoven's 7th.

It is a curious feeling for me to hear my work from 1978 alongside that from 1955, especially since I am the only person who knows what took place for me during the intervening years. I think my work has grown. But the initial effort is one of which I'm still very fond, and even a little proud. I hear the imperfections of course, but in context they seem quite forgivable. And music remains the thing worth striving for.

Barbara Lea



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A WOMAN IN LOVE

BARBARA LEA

With **BILLY TAYLOR** and **JOHNNY WINDHURST**

- 1 **COME RAIN OR COME SHINE** (B) 4:02
- 2 **AS LONG AS I LIVE** (B) 2:25
- 3 **LOVE IS HERE TO STAY** (B) 4:04
- 4 **THINKING OF YOU** (B) 2:34
- 5 **I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT YOU** (B) 3:14
- 6 **LOVE ME** (B) 2:24
- 7 **WHAT IS THERE TO SAY?** (A) 3:27
- 8 **THE BEST THING FOR YOU** (B) 2:47
- 9 **A WOMAN ALONE WITH THE BLUES** (B) 5:07
- 10 **I'M OLD FASHIONED** (A) 4:47
- 11 **TOO LATE NOW** (A) 4:15

Barbara Lea (Vocals), Johnny Windhurst (trumpet), Billy Taylor (piano), Jimmy Shirley (guitar), Karl May (bass), Percy Brice (drums)

(A) Oct. 9, 1978 Session recorded October 9 in stereo, produced by George H. Buck, Jr.

(B) 1955 Session recorded in mono at Van Gelder Studio on March 15 & 16, produced by Bill Grauer and Orrin Keepnews

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