

FROM ORIGINAL ANALOG MASTER



NANCY HARROW

ANYTHING GOES



BUCK CLAYTON'S JAZZ STARS

What a pleasure it is, in this strident age to hear singing so natural, unforced and engaging as

NANCY HARROW offers here. As those fortunate enough to have heard her before will know, she has her own voice and her own style, and she is a jazz singer in the best and truest sense of the term.

The pleasure is one of which we have been too long deprived. Nancy Harrow made two excellent albums in the early '60s, and she sang in some of New York's best jazz clubs. But around the midpoint of that strange decade, she found that there was no real demand for or interest in her kind of music, and, having a small child to raise and non-musical skills she could rely on, she quit singing. Or rather, as she put it: "I didn't decide to stop; it just happened."

So, when Nancy Harrow was offered the job of editing a literary magazine, jazz lost one of its more promising singers. Fortunately, the climate for jazz has changed of late, and some three years ago, Nancy felt that there might be people who'd like to hear what she had to offer. She sang at the Cookery—perhaps New York's best venue for jazz singers until it became the exclusive fiefdom of the venerable Alberta Hunter—and at a club on the site of the old Embers.

And now this most welcome record, the first about the approach and content of which she had final say and which, she feels, represents the real Nancy Harrow.

It is a delightful record from Porter to Berlin. The songs—all from the singer's working repertoire—are mostly standards and classics of proven merit. Nancy and her sterling accompanists make them sparkle. There are no self-conscious attempts at "updating" the material, nor any awestruck gestures toward the past. The music comes out fresh and contemporary, yet with that timeless quality that is the mark of true artistry, and all good jazz.

Trying to define jazz singing is a trap, but certain essentials can be identified. Good time is one, horn-like phrasing another. Good taste (another indefinable) and the ability to "tell a story" are two more. Nancy Harrow qualifies on all counts. Further, she makes what she does sound right and uncontrived, which is another essential. And there is the sound and special character of the voice itself, which, like a horn player's tone, always will tell.

Whatever jazz singing may be, most of what goes by that name these days is not, while all of what Nancy Harrow does is.

Take *Anything Goes*, on which only Rufus Reid's impeccable walking bass

supports the singing. (Like so many good ideas, this one was unpremeditated, and came about because Jack Wilkins was a little late in getting back from a break, and studio time is precious.) Most singers belt this song, and almost all take it too fast. Nancy's tempo is just right—the kind of middle tempo so seldom heard these days. Her phrasing is relaxed, and she swings; it serves the lyrics well, but isn't inhibited by them. As always, she is (and stays) in tune, and she uses dynamics with subtlety and taste. It's an insinuating performance, and like all of her work, unaffected yet artful. She makes it sound so easy—another almost-lost art.

Or take the blues in the collection. See *See Rider*, an archetype of the genre. Or *A Little Blue*, a new blues composed by Nancy which instantly is familiar to our ears and could come from 1920. The blues is still part and parcel of what is called "today's music" by some, but the old masters aside, few know how to sing them. Most try too hard, mixing blues with gospel, pouring on the melisma, striving to show their "roots."

Nancy, again, is relaxed. She offers no "oh yeas" and such, and doesn't bend and twist every note. She just sings the fine old song, trusting in its story, and sings the hell out of it in her own special way.

I'm not giving away any secrets in pointing out that many of the songs here are associated with Billie Holiday. (If not for Billie, who'd be singing *Foolin' Myself*?) Billie was indeed Nancy's first inspiration, and, along with Jimmy Rushing, Lee Wiley, Ray Charles and Mildred Bailey, remains one of her favorites. But the Holiday songs are not done as "tributes," and the treatment is strictly Harrow, though the spirit is a comparable one. Again, she is doing what comes naturally, as evidenced by the way she throws in an ad-lib "them eyes" at the end of you-can-guess-which song.

That Nancy Harrow is a very musical singer should go without saying. She has no trouble at all with the demanding bridge to Ellington's *Prelude To A Kiss* (Alec Wilder characterized it as "totally instrumental"). And she sings the beautiful chromatic melody in a manner that does it (and her) full justice.

Some singers, even very good ones, can make a listener painfully aware of the shortcomings of certain lyrics. Not Nancy Harrow. By some alchemy, she makes the exceptionally silly words to *My Old Flame* acceptable. (She also applies her editing talent, changing "I can't even think of his name" to "I hardly remember his name," which not only is more credible, but also "lies" better.)

The least known song on the program, *A Woman's Intuition*, is identified with Lee Wiley, who surely would have approved of what Nancy does with it. Both ladies are stylists and intelligent interpreters, attributes which are by no means always joined.

Exegesis of each selection is not required; the performances speak for themselves. but I was especially taken with the spirit and swing of *A Fine Romance*. There is a pleasant sample of Nancy's easy scatting on *Foolin' Myself* (for the edification of younger listeners, "gay" used to mean happy). It was a nice idea to treat *I Wished On The Moon*, a seldom heard song of which I've always been fond, as a samba, and on this as well as some other pieces, she does something special to certain phrase endings, extending them slightly with a vowel sound as Billie used to do. It no doubt stems from the terminal vibrato of many horn players in the Armstrong tradition, and it is idiomatic rather than imitative. In Nancy's *Ritz* she cleverly lilts her voice into a seldom-heard register for her *Puttin' On*, and that she appropriately does.

Nancy Harrow was exposed to jazz early on, by way of the record collection of her two older brothers. She remembers Lunceford, Ella, Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw as main ingredients in her brothers' collection. When she landed her first professional singing job, with the Tommy Dorsey ghost band under Warren Covington, she was "amazed to hear the old records, down to the solos played note-for-note, and find that they were still embedded in my head."

But that's getting ahead of the story. After graduation from Bennington College, Nancy was offered a spot in a dance company, but instead went to work in book publishing. Five years later she left her editing job to become a singer.

Nancy was singing at the old Five Spot when Nat Hentoff, then producing some fine records for the now legendary Candid label, heard her and asked her to record. On that debut session, she was backed by an impressive nine-piece mainstream group with Buck Clayton as leader, trumpeter and arranger.

A bit later on, Nancy was singing at the Mars Club in Paris when John Lewis walked in. The club had no microphones, but what Nancy projected came through. Lewis, then producing for Atlantic, master-minded Nancy's second album. The varying support ensembles included such stellar players as Jim Hall, Phil Woods, Dick Katz, Richard Davis and Lewis himself.

Nancy worked at the Jazz Gallery with Dick Katz, Major Holley and the marvelous Denzil Best, and she played the Café Au Go Go with Kenny Burrell—

standouts among other gigs. But phase one of her active singing career was nearing its end. (It is indicative of the then prevailing situation for jazz that the clubs where she worked were soon to fold or change policy.)

Nancy's second child was born in 1969, and shortly afterwards she returned to publishing. Working as the editor of *American Journal*, a literary magazine which gained a loyal following during its brief life, was satisfying. "Charles Kuralt told me he took it on the road with him," Nancy recalled.

Then, almost a decade after she'd stopped singing professionally, "the music seemed to be coming back. I got the job at the Cookery, sang at a couple of other places, and worked with Buck Clayton and Richard Wyands at Upstairs at Cecil's—the old Embers."

At about this time Nancy, who had studied classical piano for many years, decided that "it was ridiculous that I couldn't play any jazz on the piano." So, three years ago, she began to study with the redoubtable Sanford Gold and his partner (but not relative), Norman Gold. She is still at it, and "delighted with it." She also recently composed her first own songs, with Margot Hentoff as lyricist.

For this record she chose Bob Brookmeyer, an old friend who himself has only recently returned to the jazz limelight, as a &er man, arranger and advisor. It was a good choice; Brookmeyer is a man of taste and wide experience.

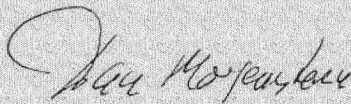
His arrangements are helpful and entirely unobtrusive, charting a smooth path for the singer and her accompanists. Using a guitar in place of the more customary piano was Nancy's idea. "I heard Jack Wilkins and wanted to record with him. Working with a guitar seemed natural—I'd done it with Kenny Burrell. I didn't miss the piano at all."

Wilkins, one of the most impressive among the many talented young guitarists to come along in recent years, offers fine support and is heard in occasional brief but telling solo spots. Check him out on *Them There Eyes* and *Foolin' Myself* in that capacity, and hear how he enhances *See See Rider* with a conception that complements (and compliments) the singer's. Fully exposed, Wilkins wails in down-home fashion behind Nancy's vocal on her original blues, *A Little Blue*.

Rufus Reid, whom I first heard in Chicago when he was still undecided about a career in music or science, ranks with the best. His ear, time, and sound are equally impressive, as he has been demonstrating with Dexter Gordon's quartet. Reid walks Nancy swingingly through *I'll Get By* and *Anything Goes*. And he plays for the cause.

Billy Hart's technique was outstanding from the start, but he keeps growing as a musician. Among his notable associations have been Wes Montgomery, Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner and Stan Getz. He's appropriately discreet here, but makes himself felt, notably in the last chorus of *A Fine Romance*.

Nancy Harrow was already an exceptional singer in the first stage of her career. She has mellowed and matured. It is a rare pleasure to have her back—and if it's not for good this time around, something must be very wrong indeed. With us.



Dan Morgenstern
*Director, Rutgers Institute of Jazz
Studies*

The text above originates from the CD liner notes.

2xHD decided to omit some tracks due to the unacceptable condition of the tapes received.

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Pure Emotion

NANCY HARROW



JACK WILKINS, guitar and leader,
RUFUS REID, bass,
BILLY HART, drums

Recorded at Downtown Sound, New York, N.Y.
Nov. 29 and Dec 18, 1978 under the
supervision of Bob Brookmeyer
Produced by George H. Buck
2XHD MASTERING BY RENÉ LAFLAMME
2XHD EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: ANDRÉ PERRY
Artwork: André Perry / Graphics: Sylvie Labelle

- 1 **ANYTHING GOES** 2:20
(Cole Porter)
- 2 **COME RAIN OR COME SHINE** 2:52
(Harold Arlen-Johnny Mercer)
- 3 **A FINE ROMANCE** 2:23
(Jerome Kern-Dorothy Fields)
- 4 **A WOMAN'S INTUITION** 2:23
(Victor Young-Ned Washington)
- 5 **I'VE GOT A CRUSH ON YOU** 3:10
(George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin)
- 6 **HE'S FUNNY THAT WAY** 2:23
(Neil Morel-Richard Whiting)
- 7 **THEM THERE EYES** 2:23
(Maceo Pinkard, William Tracy & Doris Tauber)
- 8 **FOOLIN' MYSELF** 3:13
(Jack Lawrence & Peter Tinturin)
- 9 **I WISHED ON THE MOON** 2:19
(Dorothy Parker & Ralph Ringer)
- 10 **MY OLD FLAME** 2:11
(Arthur Johnston & Sam Coslow)
- 11 **PRELUDE TO A KISS** 2:41
(Duke Ellington-Irving Gordon & Irving Mills)
- 12 **SEE SEE RIDER** 4:18
(Ma Rainey)