

A black and white photograph of a woman, Jacintha, singing into a vintage microphone. She is wearing a dark beret and a dark coat. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on her face and the microphone. The background is dark and out of focus.

*J*acintha

HERE'S TO BEN

A Vocal Tribute To Ben Webster



Jacintha - Here's To Ben

There are few voices so perfect that they seem suited to any type of music. Jacintha has such a voice.

The Singapore-based vocalist is already known in her homeland as an actress and popular recording artist. Now she broadens that reputation with this recording, *Here's To Ben*, in which she's joined by a

quartet of top-ranked jazz musicians for a look at songs associated with the late saxophonist Ben Webster. It's quite a change for an artist whose last recording covered tunes from Sting, Lennon & McCartney, Stevie Wonder and others. But, in truth, it's a return to the music she grew up loving.

"Ben Webster and I seem to have nothing in common save that I somehow grew up singing these songs in Singapore, knowing and loving them," Jacintha says. "Ultimately, jazz is where I live. It's like home to me. I always loved to sing jazz, but as a recording artist, I've been given few opportunities to do so."

Here's To Ben is that opportunity. It's a collection of classic jazz standards – "Star Dust," "Tenderly," "Georgia On My Mind" – that have been interpreted by a host of jazz artists, including Webster over the years. Joining Jacintha on the recording is a super quartet of U.S. musicians: former Miles Davis keyboardist Kei Akagi, legendary West Coast saxophonist Teddy Edwards, Larance Marable, the drummer heard with Charlie Haden's Quartet West and bassist Darek Oles, who's played with everyone from Ravi Coltrane to Lee Konitz. The result of this cross-cultural, cross generational project is a recording that marks the emergence of a distinct new voice in jazz.



Jacintha comes from the proverbial musical family. Her Chinese mother sang and played the piano. Her Indian father was a classically trained guitarist and acoustic bassist who taught music and exposed her to such artists as Wes Montgomery, Laurindo Almeida and Miriam Makeba. Her brother plays the cornet. She won a local talent contest singing jazz when she was 17. Beginning in 1981, she's played a variety of dramatic and musical roles on the Singapore stage and she continues to be in demand for theater and television appearances. Her debut album, a techno-pop date titled *Silence*, was released in 1983. She followed with a collection of Spanish songs *Tropicana* in 1987 and, in 1991, released *Dramamama* followed by a subsequent tour of Japan. Her last album, *My Life*, came out in 1997.

Jacintha has appeared at a number of international music festivals including the Los Angeles Pop Song Festival and won the Best Performer awards in the 1987 ASEAN Pop Song Festival. In 1987, she performed in Singapore with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta and has also sung with the Danish Radio Orchestra on a visit to Denmark. She was the special guest of well-known Japanese trumpeter Terumasa Hino during a 1991 tour of his homeland and for a second time in 1996.

All this experience has well-prepared Jacintha for the kind of expression required to sing jazz. It also explains why she fits in so well with the jazz artists heard with her on this album, even though they had not previously worked together. Listen to the way she

glides through the swinging version of “Our Love Is Here To Stay” or her unaccompanied introduction to “Danny Boy” (which was coincidentally recorded on St. Patrick’s Day) and you’ll see the truth of it immediately.

“If you’re in the moment and focused on your emotions, something comes through. These songs have been sung by a thousand voices. The one thing I wanted to bring to them is feeling.”

This appeal to emotion is Jacintha’s most direct connection to Webster. Like the saxophonist, she has an uncanny ability to bring feeling and drama to her music. “When I listen to Webster’s work, I hear all its discipline and restraint, yet it’s expressed with full emotion. It’s what the great jazz musicians do all the time, create a marriage between their technique and their emotions.”

Proof that Jacintha has made that marriage for herself is abundantly evident on this recording, as well as in the reaction of her sidemen to her performance. Pianist Akagi, whose resume includes stints with Davis, saxophonist Stanley Turrentine, flutist, new-music composer James Newton, percussionist Airtio and guitarist Al DiMeola (not to mention a handful of fine recordings under his own name), marveled at her abilities. “She’s a fantastic singer and a joy to work with,” he asserts (Akagi arranged all the material on this album). “She’s going to be a major talent.”

Saxophonist Edwards, a man who once worked with the great Billie Holiday, was also impressed. “Billie once told me that her favorite saxophonists were Lester Young, Charlie Parker and me, in that order,” he

says proudly. “My job is to knit my sound around the singer, to enhance what the singer is doing, but to stay out of the way.”

“Jacintha can surprise you with that beautiful sound,” Edwards continues. “And she has unusual stamina. Singing ballads is hard, it can really drain you. But (during the recording session) she sounded as good at the end of the day as she did at the beginning. She’s going to create a big sensation.”

The session, conducted over two days at Ocean Way Studios on Sunset Blvd. in Hollywood was a particularly relaxed affair. An array of candles scattered around the room made for a mellow mood and the performers had no trouble finding common ground. Drummer Marable, whose many credits over a long career include Stan Getz, Chet Baker, Zoot Sims, Wes Montgomery and Dexter Gordon, showed his adeptness at adding percussive color and shading with both sticks and brushes. Bassist Oles created a firm foundation over which the singer and the instrumentalists could soar. Edwards wove his soulful sound in and out of the proceedings.

“I really felt safe in the best possible way with these musicians,” Jacintha explains. “I felt looked after. They understood what I was going for and didn’t hold back any of their emotional qualities. And it was great to hang out with them, to hear Teddy talking about Ben and Stan Getz and Billie Holiday, to get that oral history of jazz.”

As great as its accompanists are, the biggest impression left on hearing the recording is Jacintha’s. Her voice can be warm, delicate and sophisticated (“How Long Has This Been

Going On?”), or filled with melancholy (“In the Wee Small Hours Of the Morning”) One hears joy, yearning; the drop of a tear. Her phrasing is smooth and intelligent. She doesn’t overstylize her presentation, but instead lets her clear tones and enunciation carry the lyric. That emphasis on words makes her a storyteller of sorts, something complemented by her theatrical background.

She’s tried to listen – and learn – from as many singers as possible and admits to studying everyone from Shirley Horn and Cassandra Wilson to Karen Carpenter. Her intent here was not to imitate Webster’s versions of the tunes. “That would be assuming too much. I didn’t try to copy anything that he did. All I could do was listen and hope that some of his warmth, some of his emotion would carry over.”

The selections give Jacintha the chance to do just that “These are songs of memory, loaded with the light, the conversation, the smells that our memories carry,” she says, “remembered in fragments, drenched in longing. They contain the life of one jazz man who played his truth as he felt it.”

Recorded direct to 2-track, these sessions have the quality of a live performance; they possess an ambiance that transcends the sterile perfection of many (most) studio recordings. They bring you closer to the musical ideas being presented by the performers and into the heart of the songs. Listening to Jacintha, you will feel the same way too.

Bill Kohlhaase



VOCALS:
Jacintha

TENOR SAXOPHONE:
Teddy Edwards

PIANO:
Kei Akagi

BASS:
Darek Oles

DRUMS:
Larance Marable

• **Producer:** Joe Harley

• **Co-Producer:** Ying Tan

• **Executive Producers:** Ying Tan and Sebastian Koh

• **Engineer:** Michael C. Ross

• **Assistant Engineer:** John Sorenson

• **Mastering:** Bernie Grundman, Bernie Grundman Mastering,
Hollywood

• **Album Photography:** Joseph D'Alessio

• **Jacintha Hair & Make-Up:** Barbara Leister

• **Graphic Design:** Kathleen Blakistone

• **Liner Notes:** Bill Kohlhaase

• **Jacintha Management:** Springroll Creative Entertainment Agency
(Singapore)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Adam Roper, Stevie Wonder and all the wonderful folks at Wonderland, Ruzita and Jimmy Wee at Springroll, Lim Kay Tong for the loan of all his Ben Webster CDs, Claris at Ocean Way, Steve Gerard, Boon and Fred Church.

TECHNICAL INFO

This recording is all-analogue, live to 2-track direct. The recording was made on an ATR-100 tape machine with BASF-900 1/4 in. high resolution tape running at 30 ips. A vintage Neumann M-49 tube microphone was set-up for Jacintha's voice and the recording and mastering cabling for this session was supplied by Audioquest.

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