



EDEN ATWOOD

This Is Always
THE BALLAD SESSION



In modern times, the word “ballad” has come to mean a “slow, sentimental popular song, esp a love song,” or so claims Webster. That shallow definition ignores the fact that the ballad is a centuries-long tradition of human expression, one that spans Irish, Celtic, French and Mexican folk music, verse penned by Wordsworth, Keats and Shelly and 20th century standards from Harold Arlen, Johnny Mercer, Sammy Cahn, Harry Warren and a host of others. Since ancient times, ballads have dwelt on love, good, bad and indifferent.

No matter what time or place it hails from, the label “ballad” suggests form and function; rhythms, rhymes, stanzas and verse. Most importantly it is the expression of the human condition.

At best, the ballad’s form becomes invisible and we are left with its dramatic message. Even as the form evolved and diversified—through the improvised lyrics of wandering troubadours, the emotionally-distant but tightly structured Parnassian school of French poets, the loosely-metered a-b-a-b rhymes of 21st century pop— the ballad has always focused on narrative.

As any balladeer of the 19th century might tell you, the ballad is part story, part storyteller. Whether 50 or 500 years old, ballads share common themes. Those who interpret ballads, be they balladeers or torch singers, perform from a place of empathy, conviction and experience. They carry their own meaning to its story.

This Is Always brings together two of the jazz world’s best storytellers: Eden Atwood, the bright standout among the current generation of vocalists, and Tom Harrell, the veteran accepted as the best lyrical trumpeter on the planet. That both these artists excel at what they do is apparent in the way they create distinctly different statements even as they perform the same music.

Eden’s story, told frankly in the notes to her previous GrooveNote release *Waves – The Bossa Nova Sessions*, includes her upbringing in harsh, spacious



1. **Without A Song**
(E. LEISER, B. ROSE, V. YUDMAN) WARNER BROTHERS MUSIC, ASCAP
2. **This Is Always**
(M. GORDON, H. WARREN) WARNER BROTHERS MUSIC, ASCAP
3. **Day By Day**
(S. CAHNE, P. WESTON) FAMOUS MUSIC, ASCAP
4. **Blame It On My Youth**
(E. HEZMAN, O. LEVANT) UNIVERSAL POLYGRAM, ASCAP
5. **Deep Purple**
(P. DEKOSTER, M. PARISH) EMI ROBBINS, ASCAP
6. **You’re Nearer**
(R. ROGERS, L. HART) WILLIAMSON MUSIC, ASCAP
7. **Serenata**
(M. PARRIS, L. ANDERSON) EMI MUSIC, ASCAP
8. **You Leave Me Breathless**
(R. FRED, F. HOLLANDER), FAMOUS MUSIC, ASCAP
9. **Come Rain Or Come Shine**
(H. ARLEN, J. MERCER) CHAPPELL & Co, ASCAP
10. **For All We Know**
(E. GOOTS, S. LEWIS) CROMWELL MUSIC, ASCAP

Montana (her grandfather is A.B. Guthrie, author of the classic novel *The Big Sky*), a distant but musical father, a struggle to survive as a singer and actress, stints in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, encouragement from the likes of Marian McPartland and Carl Jefferson of Concord Records and artistic if not commercial success at a relatively tender age.

That success did not come without difficulty. But now, based again in Montana, Eden says she's turned a corner in her life. "I feel I've grown up a bit," she explains. "I feel as if I've matured. I used to gravitate towards 'Lush Life,' 'Good Morning Heartache,' ballads that represented the more down side of life. But that's not where I am right now, I'm not as demonized as I have been in the past. Suddenly, there's a certain satisfaction in my life."

You can hear that satisfaction in her voice as she sings. It's also apparent in the material selected for this recording. Ballads tend to fall into either "love-gone-right" and "love-gone-wrong" categories. The tunes here, with one exception, fall into the former category.

The reason for this is made clear in the dedication of *This Is Always* to her husband, Bruce. "When we first got married, I thought I didn't have the potential to be a grownup, to make something out of the muck and mire of my life. He took a chance on me, took on a real challenge. Now I have great home in Montana and a husband who supports me. I couldn't do it on my own."

Tom Harrell's story is one of courage and artistic triumph. He acquired an impressive list of credits before the age of 30, a list that includes Stan Kenton, Woody Herman and Horace Silver. His most visible gig as a sideman came in the 1980s with saxophonist Phil Woods' quintet. His playing provided an

often relaxed, lyrical contrast to Woods' more bop-inspired play and established him as a leading trumpeter. He's recorded fine albums for Contemporary, Steeple Chase, Black Hawk and RCA over the years. Harrell's success has come despite the fact that he has dealt with schizophrenia for much of his life.

Eden says Harrell's exalted reputation was a bit humbling for her. "The idea that I'd be working with Tom made me nervous. He's so heavy. Characteristically, he's very quiet, very kind, very accommodating. His playing reminds me of Billie Holiday's singing. It has that fragility to it. When he plays flugelhorn, the sound has none of that brassiness that the instrument can have. It almost at times sounds like a flute. His playing is very quiet, very spare. Like Billie, Tom plays and it goes straight through you, it touches the most sensitive feelings. It's as if he shines this big huge light on you, exposing what everyone else is doing. I certainly didn't want to treat him as a sideman. I think of him as a poet."

Returning from Waves is Eden's long-time associate, past winner of the Thelonious Monk International Piano Competition and leader of his own brilliant sextet Bill Cunliffe. Cunliffe, continually in demand as an arranger, collaborated with Eden on the arrangements. "I have a sort of telepathy with Bill," says Eden.

"It's always very easy and comfortable to work with him." Also returning from Waves is Darek Oles, a bassist whose overtly expressive work has been heard with Charles Lloyd, Brad Mehldau, Lee Konitz and others. Drummer Larence Marable, a Los Angeles fixture whose touch and invention have graced recordings from such varied artists as Charlie Haden's Quartet West and GrooveNote vocalist Jacintha rounds out the ensemble.

When choosing the material, Eden followed her heart rather than her pocketbook. Unlike so many ballad collections of the last few years seeking to capitalize on the commercial success that Natalie Cole, Diana Krall and the like have had with a narrow set from the American songbook, *This Is Always* steers clear of "Body and Soul" predictability.

The Sammy Cahn-Paul Weston declaration "Day By Day," Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart's "You're Nearer" and the Max Gordon-Harry Warren title tune best express Eden's current position in life. It's no wonder that her singing here is full of genuine certainty and conviction. Her new found maturity, reflected in both tone and patience, combines beautifully with Harrell's introspection on "Serenata." "Deep Purple" is the perfect vehicle for Cunliffe, and he delivers a solo that reflects rhythmic history as well as modern cool. "For All We Know" seems a message of faith as Eden's sense of sincerity, buoyed by Cunliffe's warmth and affection, takes an almost spiritual path into our hearts.

The one piece counter to Eden's new found happiness is one of her husband's favorites. "Blame It On My Youth," with its poetic, apologetic Oscar Levant lament, is a mea culpa of sorts for those who, like Peter Pan, will never grow up. Yet, Eden is at her deepest here, making the lyric fit perfectly into the singer's newly-staked maturity. Spare backing from bassist Oles and a heart-tugging solo from Harrell that touches equally on regret, innocence and nostalgia underscore Eden's emotional relationship to her material and its power to move. Surprisingly, the song almost didn't appear on the recording. "This was the tune I was most afraid of," Eden admits. "I felt pretty vulnerable performing it, it was too revealing. Characteristically, I'm afraid of the ones that show the most of me, songs that leave you raw and naked. I asked (producer

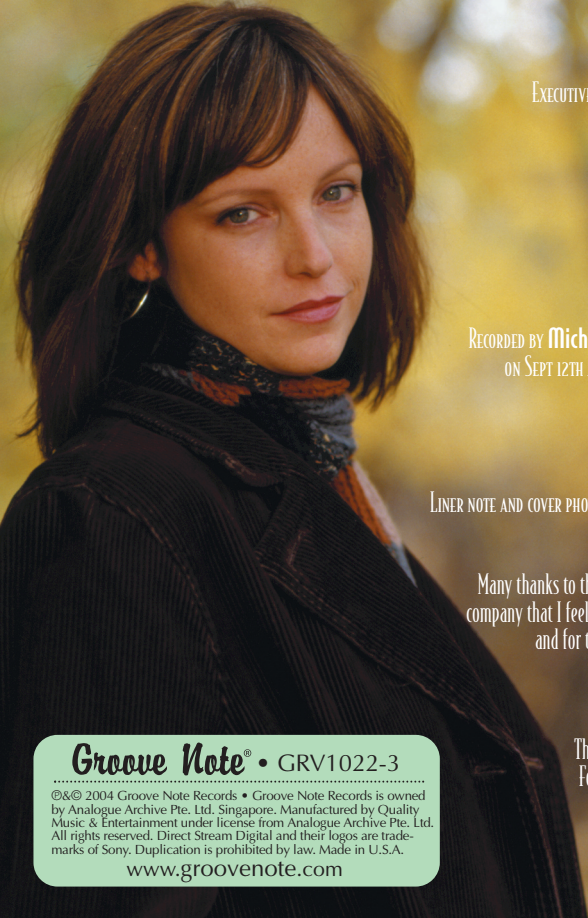
Joe Harley) to take it out. He said no."

Eden was under other pressures during the recording of *This Is Always*. Her long-held goal of motherhood was just moments away with the birth of her adopted baby scheduled two weeks after the session. "I was just frantic about it. But Bill and Joe and everyone made it so easy that I could do it naturally. I just got into the groove."

Eden and husband left Los Angeles immediately after the recording was made for Kansas City where the baby was to be delivered. Benjamin Hubbard Atwood Anderson (the "Hubbard" is in honor of Eden's late father), disregarding the doctor's timetable, was born the next day.

Not long after this recording session, I attended Eden's first major concert since she became a mother (it was also Benjamin's first appearance at one of mother's performances—he received rave reviews). Her amazing presentation of ballads, blues and a jazz rendition of "Satisfaction" on a sub-zero November night during the annual Jazz Montana Festival was full of abandon and revelation. (Eden's live appearances are always something to behold.) This recording with its emphasis on the secure and expansive embrace of love gives a clue to her future. *This Is Always* secures a place in the rich tradition of ballads with honest expression and emotion born of experience. Eden is forever a poet vocalizing lyric, troubadour singing verse, the jazz siren melting us with song. Like all classics, this is always.

— Bill Kohlhaase has written about jazz for the Los Angeles Times, LA Weekly, Downbeat and other publications. He currently lives in Bozeman, Montana.



PRODUCED BY: **Joe Harley**
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: **Ying Tan & Sebastian Koh**

VOCALS: **Eden Atwood**
PIANO & ARRANGEMENTS: **Bill Cunliffe**
TRUMPET & FLUGELHORN: **Tom Harrell**
(TOM HARRELL APPEARS COURTESY OF BMG MUSIC)
BASS: **Darek Oleszkiewicz**
DRUMS: **Larance Marable**

RECORDED BY **Michael C. Ross** AT CASTLEOAKS IN CALABASAS, CA
ON SEPT 12TH AND 13TH AND MIXED AT LA FX IN BURBANK, CA.

MASTERING: **Bernie Grundman**
PACKAGE DESIGN: **James Lizardi**
PHOTOGRAPHY: **Terry Cyr**
LINER NOTE AND COVER PHOTOGRAPH OF TOM HARRELL: **Bruce Anderson**
CABLES: **AudioQuest**

Many thanks to the fine musicians on this record. It is in your company that I feel able to express myself musically most fully and for that I am eternally grateful. Thank you, Tom, for your music, it was a humbling and uplifting experience for me.

This record is dedicated to my husband, Bruce.
For our home, our life and our son. I love you.

— Eden Atwood

Groove Note® • GRV1022-3

©&© 2004 Groove Note Records • Groove Note Records is owned by Analogue Archive Pte. Ltd. Singapore. Manufactured by Quality Music & Entertainment under license from Analogue Archive Pte. Ltd. All rights reserved. Direct Stream Digital and their logos are trademarks of Sony. Duplication is prohibited by law. Made in U.S.A.

www.groovenote.com