



JAZZ with Sam Polson

Joe Martin
Not By Chance ★★★★★
Anzic Records
Playing Time 69:17

Joe Martin and the group of all-stars he's assembled for this release put to rest the old adage that "too many cooks spoil the broth." In this case, bassist Martin, pianist Brad Mehldau, reedman Chris Potter, and drummer Marcus Gilmore — all masters of jazz cuisine in their own right — fold together for a most delectable dish.

This isn't to say the entire meal here consists of a buffet of blended group sounds, as tasty as that may be when it's served up. On the contrary, every member of the quartet is given ample solo space to show their wares and they make the most of it whether the recipe calls for them to roast, simmer, or boil. They disdain, however, to just cool it.

Leader Martin accounts for all compositions on the nine-track menu save one. That lone offering is Jaco Pastorius' "The Balloon Song" featuring a unique unison blend of Martin's bass and Potter's bass clarinet played over shifting meters provided by Gilmore and Mehldau. The remaining eight cuts are primarily mid-tempo pieces that swing lightly and offer free space for all concerned. Some of the most enjoyable moments come when Potter (usually on tenor sax, but also picking up the alto and soprano from time to time) and Mehldau pick at each other playfully with harmonic and rhythmic jibes such as on "Cachet."

Two of the tracks, "A Dream" and "Far," take a more moderate approach with the latter opening on an organ-like blend of tenor sax, piano chords, and bowed bass before Gilmore's frisky brushes introduce a series of relaxed soloing. "A Dream" is just what the title implies: an impressionistic float through the channels of a delightfully drowsy mind.

All in all, these master musical chefs have prepared a sumptuous spread to be set before us — and collectively they didn't spoil the broth.



POPULAR MUSIC with Kerry Dexter

Claire Lynch
Whatcha Gonna Do
Rounder Records

Claire Lynch sings in a warm, inviting soprano, choosing music that begins in her bluegrass band background and confidently explores folk, country, and swing styles as well. She's an artist who balances fun and serious sides in her song choices, too.

Her latest release, *Whatcha Gonna Do*, ranges from considering the crossroads of decisions (and letting you know you're not alone in facing them) in the title track to the open-hearted celebratory vibe of "Great Day in the Mornin'." Then there's the wry and funny comment on faith and prayer in "Face to Face," an original by Lynch, and you'll probably see yourself in her words, whatever your thoughts on those subjects.

"Mockingbird's Song" is an elegant way of handling the emotions of a love betrayed, while "Highway," written by Lynch and Irene Kelley, is a beautifully bittersweet look at grieving love's hurts. Both the strength and vulnerability found in loving is the subject of "That's What Makes You Strong" by Virginia resident Jesse Winchester which Lynch sings as a duet with the writer. Although it might seem unlikely at first, the silk and sandpaper pairing of her relaxed soprano and his high tenor works really well. There's a train song, too, a fast-paced song that hews to the bluegrass side of things called "Crazy Train," and several story songs, including "The Woods of Sipsy," inspired by Lynch's self-sufficient, backwoods-living grandmother-in-law.

Through the dozen cuts, Lynch is supported primarily by the three members of her road band, each of whom is an award-winning player. Jim Hurst handles guitar, banjo, and mandolin; Jason Thomas adds mandolin, fiddle, and backing vocals; and Mark Schatz plays claw hammer banjo and bass on the album. It's a tight ensemble, well suited to backing Lynch's expressive voice.

If you're looking for a good listen, one that offers songs of intelligence, grace, and humor, this could be your record and Claire Lynch could be your artist. Lynch and her band often play at acoustic venues in the D.C. area, and also tour internationally.



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