

Anita Wardell – Press Cuttings & Reviews

Review of “Noted” by Jack Massarik, Evening Standard

Baffling though they often are, this year’s BBC jazz awards got something right by handing this singer a Best of Jazz Award “for performing in a classic jazz style”. Though seldom heard on BBC airwaves, Anita Wardell is an exceptional talent. Whereas most singers bluff their way through wordless bars without making any sense, Australia-reared, Guildford-born Anita is a true seat-singer. She thinks like a trumpeter or saxophonist, creating shapely lines to suit the song’s chord structure.

Her latest album, *Noted* (Specific Jazz), finds her writing “vocalese” lyrics based on instrumental performances that many jazz fans know by heart. *Moanin’*, for instance, came note-for-note from Lee Morgan’s memorable trumpet solo on the Jazz Messengers’ *Blue Note* album. Urged on by Robin Aspland’s bluesy chordwork and Alex Garnett’s feisty alto and tenor saxes, Wardell’s words and sounds fitted the line flawlessly.

Similar treatments of *Autumn Leaves* (using Cannonball Adderley’s alto solo from the album *Somethin’ Else*), *Blues on the Corner* (McCoy Tyner), *What If I Don’t* (Herbie Hancock) and *Lonely Woman* (Horace Silver) were sung with such expertise that Garnett blew her a respectful kiss. Anita then announced *Watermelon Man*, stressing that it had nothing to do with a radio item on female sex tourism in Jamaica that she’d heard on Woman’s House that morning. Pity. Some new lyrics might be a big improvement. 4/5

Review of “Noted” by Peter Quinn, Jazzwise

Anita Wardell’s exceptional sense of time even extends to the release of her CDs, with *Noted* coming hot on the heels of her winning the “Best of Jazz” category in the 2006 BBC Jazz Awards. The gong is richly deserved, the singer’s mercurial musicality and acute sense on improvisational freedom can at times take the breath away.

Citing Jon Hendricks as an important influence on her own style, it seems only natural that Wardell should choose to record an album consisting entirely of vocalese arrangements of 10 iconic *Blue Note* tracks. In the company of her regular trio of pianist Robin Aspland, bassist Jeremy Brown and drummer Steve Brown - with esteemed saxophonist Alex Garnett adding immeasurably to the mix - the singer kicks off with Art Blakey's *Moanin'*. If, like me, you thought that Lee Morgan's famous solo was one that would never transmogrify into vocalese, then prepare to be amazed. Herbie's *Watermelon Man*, *Autumn Leaves* in Cannonball Adderley's version from *Somethin' Else*, a brace of Horace Silver tunes (*Lonely Woman* and *Doodlin'*), Lee Morgan's own *The Sidewinder* - every track provides a sugar-rush of listening pleasure. A blistering collection that will sweep you up in its virtuosic embrace. 4/5

Review of “Noted” in Manchester Evening News

The worthy recipient of an accolade at this year's BBC Jazz Awards recently, Anita Wardell has emerged onto the scene with a voice and a name that lend themselves with ease to the jazz idiom. Inspired by the improvisations of the great Eddie Jefferson and the Lambert, Hendricks and Ross trio, Wardell with her debut album has made a judicious selection of songs taken from the legendary repertoire of the *Blue Note* label, adding her own lyrics in some cases to classic instrumentals.

Three features immediately impress: the challenging choice of material; the aplomb with which the songs are delivered; the space afforded to the band as a whole, enabling the excellent ensemble to fully explore a tune and in the process giving something of a live feel to proceedings. Among the highlights is a gorgeous rendition of Horace silver's *Lonely Woman*, a nice re-working of *Autumn Leaves* at mid-tempo pace after a balladesque beginning and a catchy club winner in Lee Morgan's *Sidewinder*. Anita Wardell comes across as somewhere between an Annie Ross and perhaps a female equivalent of a Kurt Elling, and the latter may well be a good role model for her to follow.

Review of “Kinda Blue” by John Fordham, The Guardian

This is a straightforward jazz singer's album of blues-related songs, so what can a contemporary singer do to step out of the crowd of generic rivals, or rise above the great performances of the past?

Anita Wardell, the UK-resident Australia-raised singer, has been one of the most engaging live performers on standard material over a decade, and last year's *Noted* album rightly won acclaim.

The yearning, lost-love quality that inevitably clings to some of this material gives the album something of a languorous, dinner-jazzy quality and Wardell reserves her compelling combination of Norma Winston's stillness and purity and her own forceful swing and bop-scat agility for the later stages.

There's a fine account of *The Meaning of the Blues*, some quirkily Monkish instrument-like improve and a little Hammond organ earthiness, with excellent pianist Robin Aspland typically sharp-eared. But hardnosed jazzers might want a bit more grit and edge.

Review of “Kinda Blue” by Kevin Jones, Sydney, Australia

Australia's loss has been London's gain for more than a decade in Anita Wardell, whose natural affinity with swing and scat allied with that rare ability to sensitively express a ballad and make a song her own, is the complete package. Add her penchant for vocalese (singing words to jazz solos) and you have something very special. The 2006 BBC Jazz awards winner's second album for the label is built around the word “blues” although some songs are only related. Enjoy the ebullient scat singing (*Limehouse Blues*), expressive longing (*I Gotta Right To Sing The Blues*) and the quirky (*Loose Bloose*). 5 Stars

Review of Live Performance at Vortex (15th Jan 2010) by Chris Parker

Mark Murphy (who, as a man many regard as the world's greatest living male jazz singer, should know) calls singer Anita Wardell 'a gift from Australia', citing her 'expressive' ballad singing and her 'courage to scat a ballad or two, not unlike a young lady disciple of the Ben Webster school' in support of his opinion.

As if to confirm the accuracy of this assessment, she went straight into a couple of perky but controlled scat choruses in her jaunty, life-affirming opening number, *It's Love*, and continued in this vein throughout her performance, interspersing adventurously interpreted standards with the odd 'straight' Brazilian number or torch song.

The gig was billed as a quartet concert, however, and accordingly pianist Robin Aspland, bassist Jeremy Brown and drummer Tristan Mailliot were also heavily featured in their solo capacities, Aspland in particular sparkling in the up-tempo numbers, and (one of the evening's highlights) lightly tripping through the hospitable changes of *If You Could See Me Now*.

As Wardell indicated in her remarks introducing the first set's closer, *Little Boy Don't Get Scared* (a Stan Getz solo from 1951 with lyrics by King Pleasure and Jon Hendricks), vocalese is a jazz mode close to her heart, and – as an offshoot of scatting – an area in which she might be expected to operate with aplomb, so the skill and dexterity of her negotiation of the song's many hairpin bends was a delight to witness; famously prickly composers (such as Cole Porter, whose *Night and Day* provided the basis for one of Wardell's most daring scats) might well complain that their subtle, carefully contrived lyrics (not to mention their songs' sentiments) are rendered somewhat redundant by an approach such as Wardell's, which (they would say) sees songs' melodies mainly as accommodating chord sequences and lyrics chiefly as scat-fodder, but such strictures were clearly nowhere in the minds of an audibly delighted near-capacity audience.