

04/19/10 By Christopher Loudon

The Heather on the Air

If you're a fan of John Pizzarelli and Jessica Molaskey's *Radio Deluxe* and Judy Carmichael's *Jazz Inspired*, then there's another wonderfully eclectic program featuring a multitalented jazz vocalist that you need to add to your regular radio schedule. It is called simply *Sunday Afternoon Jazz*, hosted by Newfoundland-born chanteuse Heather Bambrick, airing Sundays from noon to four (EST) on Toronto-based JAZZ-FM (and globally accessible online at www.jazz.fm).

Blessed with a bubbly personality comprised of equal parts sunshine and sass, the on-air Bambrick is as quick-witted as she is charming. But she is no lightweight. Her knowledge of jazz is as intense as her respect for its practitioners. The focus of her show is primarily, though not exclusively, vocalists. Her all-embracing playlist will, on any given Sunday, extend from Ella and Sarah to Robin McKelle and Raul Midón, with plenty of elbowroom for the occasional Metheny, Mehlidau or Motian track.

A natural-born storyteller, Bambrick weaves engaging tales of her own domestic and professional adventures, including plenty of lively, down-home yarns, with stories of her jazz community pals (particularly her good chum, fellow Canadian vocalist Emilie-Claire Barlow) and insightful tidbits about the music and musicians to stitch together a vibrant, four-hour jazz crazy quilt.

Perhaps it's her Canadian humility at play, but Bambrick rarely includes cuts from her own albums on *Sunday Afternoon Jazz*. Which is a shame. Over the past few years, she has recorded two excellent solo discs and a third with actor/vocalist Rudy Webb. 2003's *It's About Time* offers a diverse assortment of tunes, showcasing the various facets of Bambrick's musical personality to excellent advantage. She opens with a "(Sing) Joyspring" as explosively colorful as fireworks, handles such wide-ranging standards as "Love for Sale," "I'm Going to Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter" and "That's All" with the easy assurance of Nancy Wilson, and examines both heartache and glee with kindred intensity on the back-to-back originals "How Come U Don't Call Me Anymore?" and "Aren't I Cute?" Then, at album's end, the lass whose heart will forever remain in St. John's embraces the quiet, natural magnificence of her native land with the lullaby-tender "Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's."

2006's *Those Were the Days* is a like-minded mélange, with a heavier dose of standards. The title track, rarely sung in full, is the Charles Strouse/Lee Adams theme from *All In the Family*, accented with one clever lyrical change from Bambrick, who substitutes "Keely Smith" for "Kate Smith." It makes absolute sense, of course, that she opts to include Lerner and Loewe's hazy "The Heather on the Hill," and it serves as an ideal companion to her dreamy reading of "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'." But the standout track is a lilting rendition of Noel Coward's "A Room with View," warm and inviting as a Jamaican breeze.

On last year's *This Is Love* with Webb, only two of the dozen tracks are Bambrick solos, including a cunningly buoyant "Always" and a shimmering "Don't Look Now." Which leaves plenty of room for her and Webb to demonstrate their delightful, honey 'n' thistle compatibility. They unite on a petal-soft, molasses-slow "They Say It's Wonderful" and a "Someone" that progresses from murky shadows to blue-skied brightness, but the collision of Webb's sandpaper and Bambrick's sunshine reaches its enticing peak on a sexy, swirling "Change Partners." She can also be heard on vocalist Ori Dagan latest, *S'Cat Got My Tongue*, teaming with Dagan for a percolating "Swing's the Thing."