

vocalist whose career spanned over five decades and 70+ albums. Wilson (who died seven years ago this month at age 81) also sang blues, R&B, pop and soul, but preferred to be called a song stylist. Her wide repertoire included well-known standards and tunes probably scarcely remembered today, famously delivered with the emotive skills of a seasoned and acclaimed actress. The album, *Sweet Nancy*, is named for one of Wilson's several nicknames (others included "The Baby" and "Fancy Miss Nancy") and over its nine tracks, Scholtz is supported by an able ensemble: Oscar Rossignoli (piano), Jason Stewart (bass), Adonis Rose (drums) and Derek Douget (tenor, soprano).

With an amazingly similar vocal timbre, the leader opens with a mildly-swinging "The Great City" (Curtis Lewis), featuring Douget's tenor. Therein follows a cornucopia of works that inspired Scholtz, including a wailing, Latinized, soul-based "The Old Country" (Nat Adderley, Curtis Lewis) with some very short and mild scat, and, among others, the love theme from the film *Houseboat*, "Almost in Your Arms" (Ray Evans, Jay Livingston), which is taken with a welcome uptempo vibe and a short but engaging piano feature for Rossignoli. Album closer, "The Very Thought of You" (Ray Noble's 1934 hit) is performed at the same languorous tempo as Wilson's version, sans the extended verse, which beautifully sets up the arc of the tune's story. No, the verse isn't vital, and verses in general are cut from most standards performed today, but they have purpose. To listen to Wilson singing this tune with its verse is a revelation, and it's too bad that Scholtz forgoes it. Yet, notably, she did include the lengthy verse of "The Shadow of Your Smile" (Johnny Mandel, Paul Francis Webster).

Scholtz' honorific to Wilson suffers the problem many tribute works have that are performed by sound-

alikes. Try as they will to differentiate their approaches, comparisons will be made. In *Sweet Nancy*, Scholtz has admirably created an album that can stand on its own, but for fans of Wilson, inevitably the comparisons might harbor disenchantment.

For more info visit melaniescholtz.bandcamp.com



Chance
Miki Yamanaka (Cellar Music)
by Ken Dryden

Pianist Miki Yamanaka has been a breath of fresh air since moving to the US over a dozen years ago from her native Japan, abandoning her graduate studies in biology in favor of music. Her previous five recordings have primarily focused on original compositions, though she tends to play mostly standards and works by others in live sets. With *Chance*, Yamanaka was thrilled to be making her first recording in the hallowed Van Gelder Studio (now run by Maureen Sickler, the founder's longtime assistant, and husband-trumpeter Don Sickler), known for its excellent acoustics and engineering.

This, her third album for Cellar Music and first-ever standard piano trio date, finds her in top form, joined by her long-time drummer (and husband) Jimmy Macbride

and bassist Tyrone Allen. Exploring an invigorating set of works both well-known and deserving of wider recognition, she includes unjustly overlooked songs beginning with the inspired setting of George Cables' "Dark Side, Light Side", capturing its power with the leader's propulsive attack; the trio interacts with the pianist, rather than serving as mere accompanists. Yamanaka's similarly driving interpretation of Bobby Hutcherson's "Herzog" showcases imaginative chops in a manner reminiscent of McCoy Tyner, while she shares the spotlight with Allen's nimble bass playing and Macbride's invigorating drumming.

The reflective, yet upbeat, setting of Geri Allen's "Unconditional Love" captures the late composer's soulful side. Yamanaka's robust exploration of pianist Kenny Kirkland's sadly neglected "Chance", creates a constantly shifting piece, building to its dramatic finale, buoyed by Allen's strong pulse and Macbride's crisp support on brushes and sticks. The leader brings out the humor within Thelonious Monk's tricky "Trinkle Tinkle", as her darting chords back Allen's dancing bass lines; she then adds a slower, jaunty variation to its theme. The bassist introduces Fats Waller's "Jitterbug Waltz" with a disguised chorus before Yamanaka and Macbride make their entrance, offering a subtle, atypically slower approach that unveils the composer's lyricism and whimsical spirit. Charlie Parker's "Cheryl" is turned inside out by the trio's twisting take. The pianist excels in finding fresh approaches to standards. She disguises "I Wish I Knew" with a bossa nova setting, Allen playing its theme with Macbride's light, swinging touch adding perfect seasoning, while her harmonically rich rendition of "Body and Soul" brings out her most lyrical side.

For more info visit cellarlive.com. Yamanaka is at Close Up Dec. 12. See Calendar.

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