



CD Review: ROUND TRIP - Marilyn Harris with the L.A. Jazz All-Stars Big Band
Wrightwood Records (WRCD-1569)

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By Edward Blanco

In 2004, singer-pianist-songwriter, Marilyn Harris climbed the charts with her highly successful and much acclaimed **Future Street** album of eleven original and dynamic songs. Inspired by music of some big band giants of jazz like Count Basie, Maynard Ferguson, Buddy Rich and Nelson Riddle, Harris realized her dream of one day playing and singing with a big band in her just released new album, **Round Trip** - a collaboration with the L.A. Jazz All-Stars Big Band. A recording of ten new originals and two standard songs with colorful big band arrangements by Mark Wolfram, this album combines the best in jazz vocals with the best of the big band swing, a tantalizing treat.

Harris possesses a cool lush voice that seems tailor-made for a marriage of song and swing. She fronts an ensemble comprised of players who are the cream of the Los Angeles area and West Coast jazz scene. The band includes saxophonists Pete Christlieb, Dan Higgins and Don Shelton, trombonists Andy Martin and Charlie Loper, trumpeters Wayne Bergeron and Rick Baptist and drummer Pete Erskine to name a few. After only one listen, I knew this was a special recording. Exciting, energetic, full of fire and grit, Harris does it all with her voice, the piano and her clever compositions. When you hear the first track, the title song, you know you're in for one pleasurable ride.

The third song in this set. "I Don't Gamble," is a spicy and saucy melody voiced by Harris with a Latin-tinged tempo and diced with a Pete Christlieb solo on tenor that completes a number guaranteed to make you move your hips and shoulders. Harris shows her cool side with "Bebop High," a sweet bebop tune with sharp solos by Christlieb again and Higgins on alto in a stylish big band chart. The music mellows out in the beautiful ballad, "If He Walked Into My Life." The lady sings with precise passion as her voice dances and reaches while the band plays on.

Almost an afterthought on this disc is the fact that Harris also plays a fine piano. This is none so evident as in the sensational "That Afternoon In Harlem" where it's all Harris on vocals and the piano.

Not to be forgotten however, is that marvelous band that revs up the beat in a foot-stomping, fast-paced number with "The Wisdom of Sam Kinison," a lively big band piece that Harris leads well. "Twilight World" is one of the two standards on the album one cannot help but love. Played slow and soft and marked by one beautiful trombone solo by Bill Watrous. Harris ends with the a fine jazzy finale in "They're Gonna Love Me" a lovely and brassy tune with an appropriate title because after your done tasting what's in this album, you just can't help but love her.

No question about it, **Round Trip** is an entertaining an compelling recording that showcases a superb performance by one of the best jazz vocalists in the business today. A big band album graced by the elegance of Harris and sprinkled with sparks of electricity. A disc that will appeal to anyone who likes music.

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