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## More soft jazz by Valerie Joyce

### By Jean-Claude Elias

**AMMAN** - Cool, tranquil and easy, that's the kind of jazz Valerie Joyce sings. "New York Blue" is an album by the young lady with American and Japanese blood in her veins. It features 13 tracks of soothing material that is guaranteed to lower your pulse rate and make you forget your troubles, if only for the duration of the playback.

If Joyce's voice is the main ingredient of the recipe to sonic heaven, the entire album, including the pristine performance of the instrumentalists and the high-tech recording by Chesky as well, they all contribute to make a quality of production that is hard to surpass. We are at the opposite of loud and show off here. It's all done with finesse, with subtlety and good taste.

The entire CD seems like one long, slow song. It's great if you are in the right mood but could end up being just a little a bit boring if you are not. There isn't much swinging jazz around except for "Darn That Dream" that does bring some swing though it remains relatively at a slow tempo.

Joyce comes in the prestigious line of female singers that includes Norah Jones, Madeleine Peyroux, Anjani and other great easy jazz ladies. These vocalists share a common trait - they can charm you without raising their voice, pushing up the volume or using gimmicks, be it in their performance or in the recording. They just do it naturally, simply.

Joyce uses mainly a "whispering" singing technique and constantly shifts from chest to head voice, maintaining the softness of the tone all the time. This is particularly efficient in numbers like "Golden Slumbers", a Beatles song that has been made slightly jazzy here.

Actually, on many tracks Joyce sings so softly that you have the impression that she is whispering much more than singing. Still, the control is amazing and the quality of the singing truly superior. It's the kind of sound meant to remain intimate, personal, for your ears only.

In addition to the Beatles' music there's also a good number of other covers on the album. There's even a Tracy Chapman hit tune, "Baby Can I Hold You". The classic "Fever", written by Cooley and Davenport, is rearranged while preserving the excellent bass line and groovy beat it is famous for. Other covers include "It Never Entered My Mind" and "Every Time We Say Goodbye".

The cover that you expect the least to find here is Jimi Hendrix' "Little Wing". Needless to say that it is not done à la Hendrix but à la Joyce!

Credit should be given to the piano part, performed by Andy Ezrin who also co-arranged the album with Joyce. His delicate touch and exquisite improvisation is a significant plus and enhances the overall quality of the entire recording. Few notes played maybe, but just the right ones!

Equally great, the alto and tenor saxophones played by Laurence Feldman are as essential to the sound. The highly lyrical lines are reminiscent of great performers like Paul Desmond (the Dave Brubeck Quartet) or Stan Getz. Feldman plays nonnonsense jazz that is easy to relate to and to follow.

Whatever your taste, Joyce will make a strong imprint on you. She has a musical personality that cannot be denied. She has been active on the professional music scene since 2003 and is here to stay. As for the music per se, it is nothing really innovative. It does not bring anything new to the world of jazz, but what it does bring it terms of listening pleasure is worthwhile.

Perhaps the whispering of the lady is too much by moments. I would avoid starting my day with this album, especially if I had a bad night sleep. I would need something much more energetic to wake me up and get me started for the day. On the other hand, it is the dream-like music to play after a good lunch, on a weekend afternoon. However good music may be, depending on the style you have to know when to play it.

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