

PRESS RELEASE

Claire Martin

Almost In Your Arms

- Released on Vinyl, CD and in digital distribution

Claire Martin is one of the most accomplished and inspired jazz singers in the world today. Full stop. This is a statement that would find virtually universal agreement with jazz writers, reviewers, broadcasters, listeners and live-performance audiences.

Claire is always keen to find different projects and fresh inspirations, as attested by her remarkable recordings in recent years. In 2023, her previous album, 'I Watch You Sleep', was an orchestral celebration, with pianist & arranger Scott Dunn, of her close friend Richard Rodney Bennett, the legendary composer-pianist-singer. Prior to that, in 2020, a collaboration with big band arranger, trombonist, Callum Au, called 'Songs & Stories', featured jazz standards and Songbook classics; and the year before, in 2019, she released 'Bumpin'" with a quartet led by Scottish guitarist, Jim Mullen, highlighting the compositions of Wes Montgomery.

Before these three recordings for the Copenhagen-based label, Stunt Records, her outstanding recording career was equally eclectic and varied - including collaborations with Kenny Barron, Bill Charlap, and Martin Taylor; a series of celebrated duo recordings with Richard Rodney Bennett; and projects featuring the BBC Big Band, the BBC Concert Orchestra and The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

However, on her new album, 'Almost in Your Arms', Claire returns to a previous successful formula: her highly experienced Swedish trio of pianist, Martin Sjöstedt, double bass player, Niklas Fernqvist and drummer, Daniel Fredriksson. They accompanied her on her 2019 Linn album, 'Believin' It', and appeared together the year before at Ronnie Scott's



STULP 24061



STUCD 24062

Club, in London, before going on to play to sell-out audiences in Sweden and Madrid.

To this exemplary trio, Claire has added a number of superlative guest musicians: Swedish saxophonist, Karl-Martin Almqvist; American vibes player, Joe Locke; British guitarist, Mark Jaimes; the pianist Nikki Iles, here playing accordion; and a vocal from US organist/pianist, Charlie Wood - plus the producer, James McMillan, on trumpet, flugelhorn, keyboards and programming.

So, on 'Almost in Your Arms', in addition to the inspiration created by recording once again with her trio of leading Swedish musicians, and her starry list of guests, Claire's innate enthusiasm for fresh stimulus and intriguing contrasts was invested in assembling a selection of material which she, with the assistance of James McMillan, found strong personal resonance with.

The songs Claire has chosen further indicate her wide-ranging interest and knowledge in the many sub-genre areas of popular music and jazz.

The album opens with a sparkling version of the up-tempo, timeless, songbook classic, 'I Feel a Song Coming On', written by Jimmy McHugh with lyrics by Dorothy Fields and George Oppenheimer, for the 1935 movie 'Every Night at Eight'.

The Hollywood connection continues on track two, but jumps forward forty-six years, to Tom Waits' often overlooked soundtrack to Francis Ford Coppola's 'One From the Heart'. This engaging, off-beat ballad, full of distinctive Tom Waits' imagery, is a personal favourite of Claire's. The original recording of 'This One's From the Heart' was a duet between country singer, Crystal Gayle, and Waits - and here the respective parts are marvellously delivered by Claire with guest vocalist, Charlie Wood, who brings his blues-soaked US intonation to this different, jazzier interpretation. Claire adds: "Charlie Wood agreed to join me on this duet and took my breath away. He sings with such soul and warmth. I'm very proud of our version. Adding the brilliant Swedish saxophonist Karl-Martin Almqvist was the cherry on the cake!"

On track three, Claire remains in the world of movies with her take on the warm ballad, and album title track, 'Almost In Your Arms' - written by Jay Livingston and Ray Evans for the 1958 film 'Houseboat', starring Sophia Loren and Cary Grant. Sung by Sam Cooke, in the background to a dance-floor scene, the song received an Academy Award nomination. Claire's version gives it more pep - lighter, jazzier, more swinging - and a masterclass in flowing phrasing.

Claire explains that 'Apparently, I'm Fine' is an original composition by James McMillan and myself and was inspired by something James heard someone say. We both thought it was a good song title and my story is about the end of a relationship where you would expect to be heart-broken and shattered, but instead, upon reflection, you are actually feeling pretty OK! Maybe you've dodged a bullet after all." A poignant, introspective but clear-eyed mood is created, with a skilfully restrained trio accompaniment and with Nicki Illes' accordion subtly enhancing the second half of the song.

'Bitter With the Sweet' is one of Carole King's less well-known and less covered compositions and Claire was delighted to discover it. She particularly relates to its sagacious, philosophical message. This is an energetic reading, underpinned by funky bass lines and percussion and a delightful piano solo from Martin Sjöstedt, building into a punchy brass arrangement.

There follows another of Claire's favourite songs: 'The Art Teacher' by Rufus Wainwright, who she rates as "one of the most important and interesting

songwriters of our time". It is a highly unusual, if not unique, composition for a jazz singer to choose, but Claire ingeniously adapts the original to her own style, whilst preserving the wistful, lonely and longing atmosphere of the 'confessional' lyrics, based on details related to the composer by a friend. Claire adds: "I love the story of this piece and between us we have brought our own jazz flavour to a classic Wainwright song. To have the amazing Karl-Martin Almqvist feature on saxophone is a total joy for me as he is without a doubt world-class, and his playing always goes straight to my heart."

'Train In the Desert' was written by LA-based, award-winning singer-songwriter Mark Winkler, a dear friend of Claire's, who has provided her with several songs in the past. This is a new one she picked out while on a visit last year. Claire explains: "The story of ultimate revenge is not a subject I have approached before, but I knew I had to sing it. Joe Locke is fabulous as the narrator and soloist."

The extraordinarily gifted combination of Burt Bacharach and Elvis Costello composed the next track, 'This House Is Empty Now', for their 1998 album 'Painted from Memory'. A consummate haunting piece of song-writing, and a sad exposition of reminiscence and longing, given here a soaring, emotive, vocal performance.

Singer-songwriter Ty Jeffries wrote 'Water and Salt' for his alter-ego, onstage chanteuse persona Miss Hope Springs. Claire says she "...fell in love with it immediately and knew I had to sing it. I tried to approach it with a very Peggy Lee 1950's feel. Ty's lyrics are smart and sassy and I'm so happy to have added it to my repertoire." A snappy arrangement featuring cool muted trumpet motifs.

The penultimate number on 'Almost in Your Arms' is 'September Song' - written by producer-musician James McMillan with the Oscar-winning lyricist, Don Black. A magnificent, evocative melody with, naturally, exceptionally well-conceived words. It sounds as if it's been a long-established Songbook standard. James adds trumpet accompaniment and an inspired solo - while Claire's vocal, as so often, draws just the right balance of emphasis and emotion from the lyrics, somehow combining immaculate musicality with an almost conversational tone. She notes: "We changed it slightly from the original by turning it into a waltz....it is an honour to sing any lyric penned by Don Black. I don't do enough slow

waltzes and I'm thrilled to add this original to my song list.”

The final track on the album is a second Mark Winkler song: ‘Do You Ever Wonder?’ – which Claire describes as being: “...about reflection and looking back. In my mid-fifties now, I feel I can really do that... 'We didn't know how good it was' - I think we all can empathise with that lyric. I'm proud to sing Mark's songs and champion his songwriting on my recordings because he really understands my style and this song suits me to a tee.”

It seemed fitting to examine each of the tracks on ‘Almost in Your Arms’ consecutively - as they form an incredibly well-curated selection of songs, all of particular significance to Claire Martin, with invaluable

input from James McMillan, and with the brilliant, intuitive accompaniment of her Swedish trio, and the spectacular contributions of her special guests. A truly international array of musicians with music written by a truly international array of song-writers - assembled in Quietmoney Studios in Hastings, on the Southcoast of England, for the recording sessions.

Claire Martin has been singing professionally since she was 19 years old, and has performed all over the world, across the past 37 years, even if that is hard to believe. She has won more awards and prizes than there is room to list here. Perhaps, to put it simply, some artists just keep getting better. Listen to this astounding album, if proof were needed.

I FEEL A SONG COMING ON' / THIS ONE'S FROM THE HEART / ALMOST IN YOUR ARMS / APPARENTLY, I'M FINE / BITTER WITH THE SWEET / THE ART TEACHER / TRAIN IN THE DESERT / THIS HOUSE IS EMPTY NOW / WATER AND SALT / SEPTEMBER SONG / DO YOU EVER WONDER?

Personnel: Trio: Martin Sjöstedt - piano; Niklas Fernqvist – double bass; Daniel Fredriksson – drums & percussion. Guest Musicians: Karl-Martin Almqvist – saxophone; Joe Locke – vibraphone; Mark Jaimes – guitars; Nikki Iles – accordion; Charlie Wood – vocals; James McMillan - trumpet, flugelhorn, keyboards and programming.

Produced, engineered and mixed by James McMillan at Quiet Money Studios, Hastings.
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