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Lucky In Love

The Passion Behind
Diana Krall's Art

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Although the voice flowing out of the monitors is plainly, and inimitably, that of Diana Krall on this March afternoon, a certain Sinatra aura permeates the building. It's partly the building itself, the same Capitol studios complex in Hollywood where Sinatra frequently held sway. But it's also a matter of prevailing musical attitude and material. On this mixdown day, for Krall's eagerly awaited new album, the songs in question are Sinatra-related standards, "Only The Lonely" and "But Not For Me." Her by-now classic voice and lean, meaningful piano work are entwined with lush and smart orchestral arrangements by the legendary Claus Ogerman, who collaborated fruitfully with Sinatra.

Diana Krall Credits Luck, But Those Who Really Hear Her Know Her Success Comes From A Deep Musical Love

Producer Tommy LiPuma and engineer Al Schmitt—her working partners on her last few albums, including her 1999 album, *When I Look In Your Eyes*—make assorted knob-tweaking and technical adjustments. Krall wanders around the room and settles into a side room where her laptop is plugged in. Suddenly, we hear another famous American male voice, the AOL man cheerfully announcing, "You've got mail!" Suddenly, it becomes clear we're not in the early '60s anymore. History keeps rearing back on itself with Krall.

When the reporter compliments her inventive piano solo on "But Not For Me," she demurs, referring to an important mentor in her life, "Oh, that's all Jimmy Rowles' influence." But she has to take some credit. "No," she says emphatically. "I don't."

Krall has a series of influential musicians in her life, who she regularly circles back to in conversation: Included in the list are Rosemary Clooney, her "road mother," Rowles, bandmates like John Clayton, Jeff Hamilton, Christian McBride and Russell Malone, LiPuma and Ogerman. As she describes the process by which she came to work with Ogerman, luring him out of a long-standing retirement from arranging work (apart from his classical composing), Krall says, with a serious expression: "I'm very lucky. I wish for things to happen, and they happen."

At Capitol, the atmosphere is, on the surface, relaxed. But an implicit tension can be sensed around Krall's world at this juncture, in the space between a massive success and its follow-up project. Consider that *When I Look In Your Eyes*, with Johnny Mandel string arrangements, stands as one of the best-selling albums in jazz history, having sold more than 2 million—and counting—since its release two years ago. Consider her rendezvous with the 2000 Grammys, being the first jazz artist to have been nominated for Best Album of the Year, and coming away with the Best Jazz Vocalist award. Jazz, still a marginal world in the grand music biz scheme, is unaccustomed to numbers and kudos on this order.

Krall has taken some critical heat for her work, which may be partly a suspicion of mass success in a world trained to survive, and even savor, life on the fringes. But the truth is, it couldn't have happened to a nicer woman, and someone devoted to her art.

"You have a lot of different types of pressures that you're dealing with," LiPuma says, in a June interview, a few weeks after they finished *The Look Of Love*. "You have an album that suddenly sells 2 million worldwide, and obviously, the follow-up, there's a certain amount of pressure that you can't help but have. Everybody's watching. It would have been very simple for us just to go back with the same winning team, to get Johnny. We're going to work with Johnny on her Christmas album, so it wasn't a question of her not liking what Johnny did. To the contrary. But we just wanted to do something a little different, instead of *When I Look in Your Eyes, Volume Two*."

What happened, instead, was that Krall met with Ogerman in Munich, and they initiated a creative pact. She knew and admired Ogerman's work, dating from the Michael Brecker-with-hip-orchestrations project, *Cityscape*. She explains, "I bought that when I was a student at Berklee and I used to listen to it every night before I went to bed." She also had a powerful liking for the João Gilberto album—arranged by Ogerman and produced by LiPuma—*Amoroso* (from which she got the idea to do "S Wonderful" and "Besame Mucho" on the new album), and such older work as the Sinatra and Antonio Carlos Jobim album collaboration.

"When Claus said he'd do the project," Krall says, "I got together with him and we spent a week in euphoria in the studio. I mentioned just casually 'Dancing In The Dark.' My boyfriend had just bought me *The Band Wagon*—Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse, great tunes. Claus found that interesting as well. It just became a process of he and I talking together and coming up with ideas.

By Josef Woodard



FRANCOIS JACQUES

"He talks in visuals. He describes things like, 'This is Edward G. Robinson on the bridge on a foggy night.' I completely relate to those kinds of visuals. I always have pictures of things in my head. He thinks in cinematic terms. We talked about *All About Eve* one afternoon, while we were working on stuff, or we'd talk about Barbara Stanwyck."

Just as *When I Look In Your Eyes* relied on the interplay of Krall's voice and Mandel's enticing arrangements, *The Look Of Love* gets much of its points of sophistication from the orchestral backdrops designed by Ogerman. His distinctive arranging voice threads throughout the album, with special spotlighted sections on "Besame Mucho" and "Love Letters," and a mesmerizing coda section on "Dancing In The Dark." Here, subtle, identifiably Ogerman-ish harmonic clenching recalls the insinuating, haunting tag section on "Let's Face The Music And Dance," flecked by Mandel's string chart, the striking first track of *When I Look In Your Eyes*. In these small, revisionist ways, Krall and Co. give hoary songs new twists, new emotional relevance.

Whatever the commercial fate of *The Look Of Love*, it may well

be her best work to date. On its set of 10 bossa novas and ballads (indeed, one early working title was simply *Ballads And Bossa Novas*), Krall's minimalist vocal style has never sounded more mature or empathetic. The album's emotional tenor is reflective, and romantic without apology, without any hints of quirky crowd-pleasers from past albums, i.e. "Peel Me A Grape" (from 1997's *Love Scenes*) or "Frim Fram Sauce" (from her 1996 Nat King Cole tribute, *All For You*).

In late June, soon after *The Look Of Love* wrapped, Krall found herself in Nashville to perform with the Nashville Symphony, during a week which would also take her to the opening night of the Montreal International Jazz Festival—her first major Canadian gig in a year, where she received the "Ella Fitzgerald" prize—and then to Carnegie Hall, where she was given three standing ovations. From there, she hopped over the drink to London to play a benefit with Elton John, who, "has become a good friend in a short period," Krall says. John, in fact, wrote a tune for her, with Bernie Taupin, that has yet to be performed or recorded.

In Nashville, she sits down in the hotel lounge late one night for an interview, after the musicians had packed up. During the interview, a man from the next table sheepishly walks over with pen and pad in hand, saying, "Please pardon me, but my 15-year-old daughter eschews Radiohead for your music, and she would be thrilled if you could give an autograph." Krall, no doubt accustomed to such occasions, instinctively reaches over to turn off my tape recorder and obliges.

What's with kids these days—favoring Sinatra-esqueries over Radiohead? Therein lies part of Krall's all-important function in musical culture at the moment: She brings together listeners from wildly diverse age and cultural demographics. In a divisive age, she unites, whether she cares to admit it or not.

When suggested that Krall helps usher jazz into a broader public awareness, she gently erupts, "Oh God, don't give me that responsibility. There are other people who have been ushering it in, who I am humbled by. I'm thrilled by all the controversy that has gone on with Ken Burns' *JAZZ* documentary. To have jazz discussed on the front page of the Arts section of *The New York Times* and magazines is a fabulous thing.

"In London, they're playing it now, and they're talking about Chick Webb and Benny Goodman. The point is, they're talking about it. Maybe there will be a little war over it, but it's so important to have that series."

As it turned out, "Only The Lonely" and "But Not For Me," as well as a choice version of "You Go To My Head" didn't make it to the final cut of 10 songs on the album, but will no doubt find their way off the shelf at some point. "Those went to the big box set in the sky. Hopefully, I'll have a box set before I'm dead," she laughs.

Needless to say, *The Look Of Love* became the longest, most elaborate project she has yet done. "It took from January until two weeks ago, when we just finished the last OK," she says. "We're going to zip up the snowsuit, put on the idiot mitts and send the kid down the block to the little yellow bus. You wish him well and say, 'Play nice with the other kids.'"

She has high hopes but no grand delusions about the album. "It is a representation of where you are at this time. Of course, you want to make the best and most musically honest album you can make, that has integrity and balance. You want to make a record that is the best record you can possibly do, for all the right reasons, which are musical reasons."

"The only thing I'd like to do in my life is to make a beautiful record. If there's comic relief on some records, that's part of where you are. On this record, I'm not trying to go away from that. Some people might say, 'Why aren't you doing something like the last record? Where's the 'Peel Me A Grape?' That's not what I'm thinking about right now. This is what I'm thinking about. I'm moving forward."

Intense scrutiny comes as part of the landscape of fame, especially in a musically obsessive field like jazz. Krall is still uncomfortable with this. "Somebody said, 'You're not playing piano as much.' I didn't feel that it was artistically necessary for me to play piano during 'Besame Mucho,' for instance. What am I going to play in there? What Claus has written is so beautiful. I don't have to prove that I can play, because I'm a piano player and people will think I'm just a singer—all these questions. It's always about music."

It would be disingenuous to ignore the fact that Krall's success is not just about the music. Certainly, it doesn't hurt that she's beautiful, blonde, smart, charming and looks good in clothes. Marketing comes into play, and why not?

Is it hard for her to reconcile the introspection of an evolving musician and the distractions of the machinery pushing her out into the world? "Yeah, but the core of that machinery is myself. So that's what is the most important thing, that I am in control of my life. It's not they, them, the machine, marketing, blah blah blah, that is pushing me. It's these people working together."

"Without sounding like, 'Oh yes, my life is all wonderful,' I have such good people around me, in every aspect of my life. There's an abundance of support, safety nets, encouragement, no bullshit. There are people who look me in the eye and tell me exactly what they think, regardless of what I say, and know that I respect their opinion and also know that they don't have to go, 'Oh, we cannot tell her what to do.'"

Control, on an artistic level, has become evermore a part of the Krall sound, and details count for plenty in her singing. Scatting is a moot point for Krall, as if she is happy to relegate improvisational content, per se, to her piano playing. Meanwhile, Krall's palette of vocal nuances are sufficiently familiar by now that listeners tend to hang on her every word. More specifically, they hang on her every treatment of words, like the way she swoops into the final "A" section of "Cry Me A River" on the new album, creeping up from the bridge: "You told me love was too plebian/you told me you were through with me and *now* you say you love me."

The tiny fissures in her voice, a hint of a growl, a whispering

vulnerability, all count for something in the big picture of her approach. Once you really hear what she's up to, Krall's voice gets under your skin. She serves as a new kind of cool-headed torch singer, who imparts an organic, emotional intensity, a quality at once intimate and universal.

As LiPuma says, "Claus said that she reminds him of these French chanteuses, who would get a song and sing them the way an actor or an actress would play a part. Sinatra was like that, too. This is what it's all about, being able to take a song and not only turn it into your song, but give it a different interpretation, and suddenly, it's got new life."

Krall looks fondly backwards when it comes to song choices. Like Keith Jarrett, she's a standard bearer, without apology. The most contemporary tune on *The Look Of Love*, for instance, is Burt Bacharach's great title song, more than 30 years old. But, Krall insists, "The songs I choose to sing are not nostalgic because they sing about love and relationships, which don't really change that much."

LiPuma agrees that Krall manages to become an advocate for the great American songbook, and has no problem with her aversion to recording contemporary or original material. "These songs are classics and they're going to live as long as everyone doesn't become drones," he says. "When you look at most of the songwriters of that era, they were all classically trained musicians, so their sense of harmony and chords and what to do with them had a lot to do with the way these songs were written. They were beautiful, melodic songs, put to lyric by some of the best lyricists of that period, and they will live on forever."

"She breathes new life into them. This is what a great singer is all about. She interprets a song and makes it her own."

"You should never lose sight of the first glimpse of the red sparkle drum set at Christmas. That same excitement. I try to keep that in mind: the music, the music, the music."

Still a fairly shy person, Krall seems as flustered by the glare of fame as she is obsessed with music, and views it as an escape route from the pressures of life "in a fishbowl." Much is known, by now, about her past. A precocious musician from Nanaimo, a small town on Vancouver Island, she received encouragement from her intensely musical household. Her father had, and still has, a mammoth record collection, in formats dating back to cylinders.

She recalls that on Sundays, "We basically put a stack of 78s on the nearest hi-fi and we'd play cards. I didn't know what I was listening to. It was everything from Duke Ellington to Jean Goldkette to early Bing Crosby and Fats Waller. I heard a lot of classical music and opera. My mother would listen to choral music or Bach, or CBC, which I grew up with in Canada. The



JAN PERSSON

house was very full of different kinds of music, including pop. I was listening to Elton John, Queen, Supertramp, Steve Miller, Eric Clapton, Wings. I would get the sheet music to 'Crime Of The Century,' Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody,' and I had the Elton John songbook—which I still have. Then I got into the stage band later on in high school. At about the same time, I was playing the music of Fats Waller and I was playing classical music.

"So it really was not one or the other, until I got Bill Evans' *Live At The Village Vanguard* and heard 'Waltz For Debby.' *Kind Of Blue* and that Bill Evans album got to me, 'Whoa, what is this?'"

She studied at Berklee, and once back in her home country was "discovered" by Ray Brown, who encouraged her to come to Los Angeles, where she studied with such teachers as Rowles and Alan Broadbent (who now sometimes conducts her shows with orchestra, like the one in Nashville). Rowles encouraged her to sing, despite her feeling that her voice "wasn't good enough." Back in Boston, Krall started to develop her life as a happy hyphenate, a pianist-singer, with a keen appreciation for Nat Cole's supple, excess-free approach.

After hooking up with producer LiPuma, especially with the release of her respected Cole tribute, *All For You*, Krall's career trajectory has taken on an ever steeper incline. LiPuma remembers that, on their first album together, *Only Trust Your Heart*, "She was very nervous. A lot of heavyweights were on the album, including Stanley Turrentine and Ray Brown. The album came out very nice, but it still wasn't the right situation." He remembers a more inspired moment, when Krall recorded a version of "And I Love Her" for a Beatles tribute album.

"At one point, she dropped this performance that just floored me. I usually stay in the room with the musicians. I don't like to stay in the booth. When it was over, I said, 'D, you've got to hear this.' As we listened, I could see the look in

her face, where she suddenly got it. Everything clicked. You work on something and try to find out the best way to do it, and if you have the time to do it, this can happen.

"Then, of course, the next thing we did was *All For You*, and that's when things just started opening up. From that point on, with every album, she got more confidence. But that was the breakthrough."

One living songwriter who Krall proclaims awe of is fellow Canadian Joni Mitchell, whose song "A Case Of You" is in Krall's repertoire. She also sung it on a televised TNT tribute to Mitchell. "Her music is so personal," Krall says of Mitchell, "but you can take that and find your meaning. I never wanted to touch Joni's tunes, because they were personal to her, the way they were sung, and musically—instrumentally, melodically as well as lyrically.

"Cassandra Wilson, who I love, was on that [TNT] show, too. She did 'Dry Cleaner From Des Moines.' To me, [Wilson] has everything. She is a true jazz singer, and she also has an ability to interpret a lyric so perfectly, at the same time having a range and a sense of improvisation—she has all that freedom."

Whereas Krall pretty much just sings the song?

"Yeah, I don't have that. I'm more limited," she laughs. "I don't have the pipes. There have been nights in some bars across America where I have scatted, but I don't do it often. It's usually after the gig somewhere."

Self-effacing superstars are not exactly a dime a dozen, but humility can go a long way toward preserving a musician's artistry and sense of growth. Krall seems to have no trouble doing reality checks on herself. "I thank my lucky stars that I get to do this," she says, as the hour gets wee and the lounge staff gets restless.

"Jeff Hamilton told me this when I was 19 years old that you get to play. I still keep that with me. Sometimes, when you're feeling tired, you lose sight of things or are maybe distracted by something. But you should never lose sight of the first glimpse of the red sparkle drum set at Christmas. That same excitement. I try to keep that in mind: the music, the music, the music."

The next night, she ends the Nashville concert at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center to warm, swarming approval. She returns with an encore of the lushly outfitted orchestra arrangement of "I've Got You Under My Skin," leaving the crowd a bit emotionally dazed.

Afterwards, a clutch of well-wishers make their way to the backstage green room. She enters the room and greets each one graciously with her usual becoming sincerity. She talks about how she'd love to play with orchestras on a regular basis, and then returns to her mantra: "I'm just so lucky right now." Those who really hear Diana Krall know that luck has got only a small part to do with it.

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