

LINER NOTES—AGES

Jazz-oriented singers who write even some of their own music are a relatively rare breed – and most of the few that try it are held back by insecurities. Nearly all of the ones I've heard are afraid to let their songs stand or fall on their own. As a way of hedging their bets, they introduce these songs at great length, so much so that by the time they finally start singing, the song itself starts to seem redundant – you feel like you've already heard it. One of the things I like best about Lorraine Feather, contrastingly, is that her songs are expertly crafted enough to be heard without any set-up. It's true that she does provide some highly-entertaining back story when she sings them live, but, you can put these songs to the acid test: stick them on your iPod (or iPhone or iWhatever), head down to your local Starbucks. Listen to these songs without any explanation or introduction, and you can still get the full impact of each and every lyric - completely on its own.

As vocalist or lyricist, Lorraine is a natural storyteller: she knows how to make a story more three-dimensional, and therefore more inherently believable, by spicing it up with just the right ingredient of opposition: the tale of the "Girl with the Lazy Eye" is leavened by the small but telling factoid that said girl once had a close (non-imaginary) friend who's now back in Paraguay. "Scrabble" is just the opposite, a novelty rag about a board game that catches us and gradually reveals itself as a rather profound song about ... surprise ... a relationship. "Perugia" uses a familiar German melody to tell us something about her English father that she learned while visiting Italy; the details are everything, but, at the same time, they're nothing – it could be anybody's story about trying to connect with a fading loved one. On the surface "I Always Had a Thing For You," is a song about someone trying to express affection (at the very least) for someone else, but it's not the complements that are important, rather, it's the feeling underneath. Note that in the song, Ms. Feather spends more time telling the intended recipient that she's trying to tell him something than she does actually telling him anything; ultimately it's more about the trying than the telling.

When you step back and ponder *Ages* from a distance, it seems like a fairly ambitious undertaking: an album that takes you through the stages of life, from childhood to middle age, told entirely in original songs. Yet, when you're actually listening to the record, none of this remotely matters – you get caught up in the stories themselves. This is an album where the trees are more important than the forest, and the parts more so than the sum – an album of telling, intimate details – and you put the whole picture together in your head without even thinking about it. "Old At Eighteen," is at first hearing, not a linear narrative at all, but an assemblage of details that add up into a moving story – just as Cole Porter perfected the "list" song, Feather is going for a collage approach to lyric writing.

As serious as that sounds, one of the main reasons I keep listening to the album, and Lorraine's work in general, is the way she communicates humor in music. "I Forgot to Have Children" takes a very serious subject and extracts a lot of laughs from it (I especially like the rhyme of "living trust" and "cracker crust"), and still, when it's said and done, there's a profound underside to it – she knows how to use comedy to support her

message, rather than undercut it. (I couldn't help but think of her father's wonderful novelty songs and the jokes in "Blow Top Blues," "How Blue Can You Get," and "Where Were You?" To those of us who knew him only casually, he always seemed very serious, but these songs show that he had a wicked sense of humor.)

Dory Previn famously described the difference between songs written by professional composers for professional singers to sing and those written by singer-songwriters to sing for themselves as the difference between objective and subjective. Increasingly, Lorraine, (like her friend, Dave Frishberg, in songs like "Do You Miss New York?") has arrived at the perfect midpoint between the subjective and the objective: "The Girl With The Lazy Eye," she tells us (I sneaked a peak at her annotations), is partly about Ms. Feather herself, and yet for a few minutes, I got so caught up in it that I started thinking it was about me. Obviously, so I was never a girl (not even metaphorically), and my eyes (as a child or now) were, if anything, over-stimulated rather than lazy, yet the details in this minor key waltz resonate so honestly and so accurately, that Ms. Feather has come up with what might be considered mass-autobiography. "A Lot to Remember" (school girl studying principles of grammar... and other rules), "Old at 18/Dog Bowl" (young woman running off to auditions, starting a career), and "Two Desperate Women in Their Late 30s" (mid-life approaches) are all songs from ages in the life of a woman who is Lorraine Feather, but, at the same time, is all of us. More than any other contemporary singer or songwriter, Lorraine Feather has captured the heart and soul of the collective "I."

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