



Robin McKelle - Modern Antique

By Marcia Hillman



Robin McKelle knows fine ways to treat a song. Once again, as in her debut *Introducing Robin McKelle* (*Cheap Lullaby*, 2006), her vocal ability and flexibility sparkles as she sings, scats and swings with a big band behind her. This time, however, she shows more rhythm and blues touches and also captures an old-fashioned torch song delivery in her treatment of mostly standard material.

McKelle has a wonderfully rich assortment of qualities in her voice. She is able to belt, be bluesy or croon a ballad. But one thing that distinguishes her is an ability to float over the really big sound behind her without getting lost in it and never letting listeners forget that this is a vocal album.

This collection of American Songbook classics is instrumentally treated in two ways: swinging and upbeat with lots of brass or ballads softened by a full string section. Most of the arrangements were done by Willie Murillo whose trademark usually includes a tight brass section. Murillo, one of the producers of the CD, can also be heard on trumpet for several of the tracks.

Notable among the tracks is the opener, a finger-snapping version of Steve Miller's '70s rock classic "Abracadabra." Then there's "Lullaby of Birdland," where McKelle takes risks slipping and sliding around the melody; "Make Someone Happy," where she simply tells the story aided by some tasty muted trumpet work by Joe Magnarelli; and "Go To Hell," a 6/8-tempo rouser with hints of Aretha Franklin. There is even an original, "Remember," where McKelle accompanies herself on piano.