

SHELLEY NEILL

Irish Eyes Gypsy Soul (Cobalt Blue)



Five years have passed since Shelley Neill completed her masterful trilogy of blues-injected jazz albums. Now Neill is back with startlingly original takes on eight familiar tunes. Neill's opener, "Fly Me to the Moon," has been swung hard by Sinatra and swung soft by Diana Krall. Neill opts for an entirely fresh tack, lazily drawing out the lyric's seductiveness to shape five minutes of scorched foreplay. Conversely, on "Fever," Neill chooses to reduce the temperature, allowing the temptation to simmer, then cranks the heat as she segues into "Comes Love."

Dipping into the pop-rock bag, she soothes the Motown-fueled, dance-fever intensity of "Heat Wave"; revivifies Dylan's "I Shall Be Released" by bathing it in waves of quiet contemplation; frees Barbara Lewis' "Hello Stranger" from its bop-doo-wop roots and refits it as a slinky, bossa-inflected lure; and transforms "Dedicated to the One I Love" from a yearning teenage lament into a sweet lullaby. But most imaginative is her take on Abbey Lincoln's "The Music Is the Magic," with Neill as shadow-enfolded high priestess, enticing passers-by to surrender before spell-binding song.

- Christopher Loudon
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