

AS YOU ARE  
LINER NOTES BY SCOTT YANOW

One of the joys of following the jazz scene is discovering new talents. On her debut recording *AS YOU ARE*, Roberta Setzu excels as both a singer and a songwriter. She displays a distinctive tone all her own, has a deep connection to the messages of her songs, scats very well, and shows a lot of sensitivity on the ballads.

For this project, the singer gathered together some of her favorite musicians. "They are all quite accomplished," she says, "and I was very lucky to get all of them." Pianist Kevin Bales, who co-produced the set and co-composed two songs with Roberta, has worked with such notables as Wynton Marsalis, Eddie Daniels, Bunky Green, guitarist Nathen Page, Rene Marie and Marcus Printup. Marlon Patton is a first-call drummer whose countless number of credits range from the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra to John Patitucci, Randy Brecker, and Wycliffe Gordon. The bass position is split between veterans Bill Thornton (Houston Person, Doug Carn and Russell Gunn) and Neil Starkey (Kenny Barron, Sonny Stitt, Al Cohn, and Herbie Hancock). In addition, South African-born Marco Martiz and Justin Powell (who has a Master's degree from the Univ. of Cincinnati) play trumpet on some of the selections.

Roberta Setzu and her musicians perform six of her originals and fresh versions of a few standards. The program begins with "Autumn Nocturne," a wistful ballad that Claude Thornhill made famous in the 1940s. Roberta hits the melody's wide intervals perfectly and displays a particularly beautiful tone on the high notes. Martiz's trumpet playing adds to the atmospheric performance.

"When I write songs, it is often a very spiritual experience. There is usually a story that draws me in and then I structure the song around it; I don't overthink, I just go with the flow and let it happen."

The first of the singer's six originals is "In The Rhythm," a happy song about being in the groove to fall in love. The swinger has fine solos from bassist Starkey and trumpeter Powell plus some inventive scat singing near its close.

"Come As You Are" begins with a sensitive piano solo, setting a mood that is accentuated by Roberta's impassioned singing. "The song, which has many layers, finds its comfort in being vulnerable. It is about having the awareness to be open no matter where you are in your life, even if it can be brutally painful. It is also about having the need to see a moment in time for what it is."

"You Are Happiness" finds her sounding quite confident in both the simple but effective message and the catchy melody with Martiz creating a powerful statement. One could imagine this song becoming a standard someday if it is heard enough.

Roberta wrote "Lullaby For Dylan" for her niece Dylan Rose as a present, a song to guide her through her life. It is about staying true to oneself no matter what.

"Da Minha Casa," which is sung in Portuguese, was written by the singer years ago when she was on the verge of leaving Italy to study jazz in New York. It expresses both her need to leave her native land and her fear of never returning, knowing how much she was leaving behind.

The quietly passionate and forlorn "Follow Me," is about "two lovers coming from different classes and social status, confessing their love in the night even while knowing the inevitability of their parting."

The impressive set concludes with an explorative version of “A Night In Tunisia” (“I wanted to display some of my background which is a mixture of different cultures, languages and sounds” ) and the traditional folk song “Black Is The Color Of My True Love’s Hair” which is taken as a duet with bassist Starkey.

Roberta Setzu was born in Cagliari, Sardinia, Italy. She was exposed to classical music and the Mediterranean's musical culture from an early age, but it was jazz that captured her heart. “I loved to make up my own music and be creative, and I never saw so much joy and freedom as I did in jazz.” She was a Jazz Studies major at Cagliari University and, although she worked as an actress in Italy and toured with World Music artists, she moved to the United States after graduation to study acting and to experience jazz firsthand. While continuing to act, she has focused on music since moving to Atlanta, performing with musicians who challenge her to stretch herself.

For the future, Roberta’s main hope is “To be able to share my music widely and to deepen my connection with my inner creator. You know? Just keep on growing.”

As You Are is a major statement by the singer/composer, a set of music filled with honest and heartfelt emotions, philosophical ideas that are relevant and universal, and memorable singing that will surely touch people’s hearts.

-SCOTT YANOW, jazz journalist/historian and author of 11 books including The Jazz Singers