

FROM ORIGINAL ANALOG MASTER

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FUSION

SHIRLEY
HORN
SOFTLY

DSD

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SOFTLY: THE SHIRLEY HORN TRIO

In Grace Paley's short story, "Wants", the narrator says of her former and current husbands: "Either has enough character for a whole life, which as it turns out is really not such a long time. You couldn't exhaust either man's qualities or get under the rock of his reasons in one short life."

I can't help thinking of these lines as I struggle with the task of trying to write some words about Shirley Horn, the most complicated human being I've ever known.

It would be difficult to find fresh ways to celebrate her music. Discriminating critics, including Whitney Balliett, John S. Wilson and Leonard Feather (who named Shirley "Best Jazz Singer of 1987" in the Los Angeles Times), have sung her praises, and so have her peers – Miles Davis, Carmen McRae, George Shearing, Ella Fitzgerald and many others. In a recent interview, singer Carol Sloane said: "Shirley takes total command and she is sitting at the piano when she does it, which is even wilder. She swings and sings the blues; she sings the beJesus out of the blues... She is probably the best singer-piano player in the world. And that's the truth... She has an enormous presence at the piano, and I am very struck with it. It makes me starry-eyed".

The singing and playing on this album speak more eloquently about Shirley's artistry than anything I could ever hope to say. So perhaps it might be more fruitful to offer



a few perplexed insights into this very private woman whom writer Kitty Grime, in her book *Jazz Voices*, calls "the cult performer... A near-legendary figure." I can address this subject with some authority because, for three years in the mid-'80s, I served as manager, though in retrospect, I suspect she really managed me. We traveled together across the United States and to England, talking, laughing, squabbling, and eating all the way. 90% of the time we delighted in each other's company; the other 10% we wanted to wring each other's necks.

The way to Shirley's heart is through her stomach. Although I had met her several times and even produced a concert featuring her interpretation of Duke Ellington compositions, I don't think I really made any impression on her until the night I took her for her first Szechuan meal in Washington D.C.'s Chinatown. After a few bites of Five-Flavor Shrimp and Twice-Cooked Pork, she looked up at me with something more than polite indifference and, by the time dinner was over, had offered me a job that I was too honored to refuse.

At first, we plotted together as merry co-conspirators producing a concert at the National Press Club, figuring out a way to wrangle an engagement at Michael's Pub in New York, pulling whatever strings we could find to get to Ronnie Scott's in London. As months turned into years, I amassed a mountain of anecdotes about Shirley, but to this day I haven't the slightest understanding of what makes her tick. In *Pnin*, Vladimir Nabokov observes "Genius is non-conformity", and that's the closest I can come to explaining her.

But I can share a few paradoxes about her. On-stage, Shirley always dresses with elegant simplicity – dark, flowing, custom-made gowns accented with one or two simple pieces of jewelry – yet, when she entertains at home, even when her guests are famous musicians or Washington dignitaries, she invariably wears flannel pajamas washed so often the pattern has disappeared. She loves acclaim from audiences and especially fellow musicians, but refuses to do anything extra-musical to encourage applause. Her arm must be repeatedly twisted before she grants an interview. When performing in a concert hall, she is reserved and majestic, but when she's relaxed, in an intimate club like Washington's One Step Down, her on-stage demeanor is very informal. While singing and playing, she'll also pluck the piano strings, smoke a Pall Mall, sip Drambuie, and scribble mysterious comments in

a notebook with a green felt-tip pen. One memorable night, while accompanying one of Charles Ables' bass solos, she swung at a pesky fly and swatted him dead on the piano lid without ever missing a beat.

Shirley is uncommonly demure in public, but in the company of her friends she's a cutup, with a comedienne's merciless eye and ear for the pretensions and speech pattern of people she meets. She never forgets a face, and never remembers a name. Sometimes she opens a set by welcoming listeners to the club she last played, an eccentricity I was never quite able to explain to bewildered club owners. She is very eager to record, but, rightly, has rejected most of the offers that could have made her a household name. I'll forever cherish the look of amused disgust on her face when a famous recent producer summoned us to his office and played tape of Janis Joplin and Linda Ronstadt as examples of what he was willing to pay her very handsomely to record.

Through all of our adventures, the linking motif was food – the Night of the 6 Pound Lobster, the Devon cream in London, rare steaks and sizzling shrimp everywhere, and the relationship-straining incident when, at 3 a.m. in Manhattan, she decided she had to have a spit-roasted chicken. Exasperated, I informed her that my managerial responsibilities did not include all-night chicken hunts and abandoned her in the middle of 3rd Avenue. Undaunted, she hailed a cab and, with the driver's help, located an open-till-dawn chicken place in Harlem and fully satisfied her craving.

Through food and Feud, Shirley has never ceased to amaze me with her boundless creativity and her ability to bring audiences to their feet. True, there were the nights when hardly anybody showed up, and insensitive club owners, crippled pianos and crummy sound systems to endure, but when everything went right, the results were electrifying – Shirley's brilliant *Women in Jazz* concert, playing on Billy Strayhorn's piano to an audience that filled Manhattan's St. Peter's Church and refused to let her leave the altar; the tribute to Miles Davis at Radio City Music Hall when Shirley and her men ascended on an elevated platform to destroy everybody with "My Funny Valentine"; her unforgettable Corcoran Gallery concert of Curtis Lewis songs that left the audience simultaneously weeping and cheering.

After three years of pretending to be a manager – during which Shirley must have lost a fortune because of my inability to wheel and deal – I resigned to devote more time to my own projects. But we have remained fast friends, and one of the products of our friendship is this album.

It was recorded in the dining room of her friend Pierre Sprey's 18th century farm house in Glenn Dale, Maryland, a relaxed and most congenial atmosphere. While Pierre, a dedicated audiophile, attended to technical details, his wife Seana treated Shirley and her sidemen – bassist Charles Ables and percussionist Steve Williams – to overflowing trays of goodies and fountains of libations. After resolving a few kinks – a bass amplifier hum, a squeaking piano pedal – Shirley, Charles and Steve settled into their music, playing almost till dawn.

The reflective mood of this album captures the late night intimacy of the recording sessions. Although, as Gary Giddens has observed, Shirley can "swing your socks off", her performances here, protected from the time-is-money anxiety and clinical ambiance of commercial recording studios, and surrounded by devoted friends and inevitably, food, is more introspective and emotionally intense than anything she has recorded to date. Softly is the best singer-piano player in the world's favorite Shirley Horn album. Could there be any higher recommendation?

THE SONGS

'Since I Fell for You' is one of the most requested songs at Shirley's club appearances. Written by bandleader Buddy Johnson, the blues ballad was a 1945 hit for Ella Johnson who recorded it with her brother's orchestra. Shirley's interpretation, which begins quietly with voice and piano, then, with Charles and Steve, builds to an intense climax in the second release, is a splendid demonstration of her extraordinary command of dynamics.

'Dindi' is one of Antonio Carlos Jobim's loveliest melodies, with a sensitive Ray Gilbert English adaptation of Aloysio de Oliveira's Portuguese lyric. Shirley fell in love with this Brazilian song after hearing the 1967 Frank Sinatra-Jobim recording

'You're My Thrill', a surprisingly erotic, Jay Gorney-Sidney Clare ballad, was written for the now forgotten 1933 screen comedy *Jimmy and Sally*. This song, which Shirley never performs before midnight was memorably recorded by Billie Holiday in 1948.

Dutch singer Ann Burton gave Shirley a tape of Joao Gilberto's recording of 'Summer' ("Estate") when the Shirley Horn Trio made its triumphant European debut at the 1981 Northsea Jazz Festival in Holland. Shirley asked me to write an English lyric for this Italian song by Bruno Martino and Bruno Brighetti. Pianist Mike Renzi translated the Italian lyric for us, which neither Shirley nor I felt the emotions are found in the melody. So I wrote an essentially new lyric, keeping a few phrases from the original and retaining the Italian title.

Shortly after meeting Shirley, I invited her to a recital at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, a two-piano program by Richard Rodney Bennett and John Phillips of classical and contemporary pieces. In the car, I anxiously played her a tape of 'I Watch You Sleep', the love theme from the film *Yanks*, composed by Bennett with my lyric. When the tape ended, Shirley was frowning. "Why didn't you give this to me?" she pouted. I explained that I hadn't known her when I wrote the lyric. "Well someday I'm going to record that son" she vowed, "and when I do, you'll be able to hear the sheets rustling."

The night before the first recording session for this album, Shirley called to tell me that 'Softly, As I Leave You', the DeVita, Calabrese and Shaper ballad recorded by Frank Sinatra, had been going through her head all day. I copied down the lyric for her, and, as if to exorcize the tune, she began the session by performing it without accompaniment.

George and Ira Gershwin's 'How Long Has This Been Going On?' was written for Adele Astaire and Jack Buchanan to introduce in the 1927 Broadway musical *Funny Face*, but dropped before the show reached New York, and ultimately used in the 1928 musical *Rosalie*. Shirley wanted to sing the verse but didn't feel much empathy for either the male ("As a tot, when I trotted in little velvet panties") or female ("Neath the stars at bazaars often I've had to caress men") original lyrics. I recommended the alternate lyric written for Audrey Hepburn to sing in the 1957 movie *Funny Face* which she uses here.

'Forget Me' is a new song with words and music by Shirley's friend Valerie Parks Brown, a poet and former Howard University French professor. Shirley has devised a Latin setting which frees the trio to soar during the instrumental section.

'My, How the Time Goes By' is an atypically bluesy Cy Coleman-Carolyn Leigh song recorded in 1961 by Bill Henderson, one of Shirley's favorite male singers. Shirley's interpretation contains echoes of Thad Jones' hard-swinging arrangement for Henderson, played by a band largely composed of moonlighting Basieites.

Joel E. Siegel
Artistic Director
Great American Songwriters
University-Community concert
College Park, Maryland



THE 2xHD FUSION MASTERING SYSTEM



In the constant evolution of its proprietary mastering process, 2xHD has progressed to a new phase called 2xHD FUSION, integrating the finest analog, with state-of-the-art digital technology.

The mastering chain consists of a selection of high-end vacuum tube equipment. For the recordings on this album, the original ¼" 15 ips NAB master tapes were played on a Nagra-T tape recorder, modified with high-end tube playback electronics, wired with OCC silver cable from the playback head direct to a Nick Doshi tube head preamplifier. The Nagra T, with its four direct drive motors, two pinch rollers and a tape tension head, has one of the best transports ever made. A custom-built carbon fiber head block and a head damping electronic system permit 2xHD FUSION to obtain a better resolution and 3D imaging.

The resulting signal is then transferred into high resolution formats by recording it in DSD 11.2 MHz using a Merging Technologies' Horus A to D converter. All analog and digital cables that are used are state of the art. The 2xHD FUSION mastering system is powered by a super capacitor power supply, using a new technology that lowers the digital noise found in the lowest level of the spectrum. A vacuum tube NAGRA HDdac (DSD) is used as a reference digital playback converter in order to A and B with the original analog master tape, permitting the fusion of the warmth of analog with the refinement of digital.

2xHD was created by producer/studio owner André Perry and audio-ophile sound engineer René Laflamme.

www.2xhd.com
Pure Emotion

SHIRLEY HORN SOFTLY

- 1 **ESTATE (SUMMER)** 8:41
Bruno Martino and Bruno Brishetti - Joel Siegel
- 2 **YOU'RE MY THRILL** 4:24
Jay Garney - (Sidney Clare) film: Jimmy and Sally
- 3 **MY, HOW THE TIME GOES BY** 5:15
Cy Coleman - Carolyn Leigh
- 4 **DINDI** 6:11
Antonio Carlos Jobim, Aloysio de Oliveira & Ray Gilbert
- 5 **HOW LONG HAS THIS BEEN GOING ON?** 7:09
George & Ira Gershwin (Musical: Funny Face)
- 6 **SINCE I FELL FOR YOU** 7:11
Buddy Jonson
- 7 **SOFTLY, AS I LEAVE YOU** 3:03
Devita, Calabrese and Shaper
- 8 **I WATCH YOU SLEEP** 6:36
Richard Rodney Bennett - Joel Siegel (film: Yanks)
- 9 **FORGET ME** 3:29
Valerie Parks Brown

THE SHIRLEY HORN TRIO:
Shirley Horn – piano
Charles Ables – bass
Steve Williams – drums

Recording produced
and supervised
by Joel Siegel
Recorded at Mapleshade
Studio, October 1987
Engineer: Pierre Sprey
Executive Producer
George H. Buck Jr.

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