

# JAZZ IMPROV

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## Chris McNulty

**WHISPERS THE HEART**—Elefant Dreams. [www.elefantdreams.com](http://www.elefantdreams.com) *Summer Me, Winter Me; Make It Easy On Yourself; Come Rain Or Come Shine; Lonely Town; Springosphere; If You Ever Come To Me; How Deep Is The Ocean; Quiet Your Thoughts, Part 1; Quiet Your Thoughts, Part 2; I Should Care; Lullaby For A Young Boy; When Love Was You and Me.*

**PERSONNEL:** Chris McNulty, voice; Paul Bollenback, guitars; Frank Wess, tenor sax; Ingrid Jensen, flugel, trumpet; Dave Pietro, tenor sax, flutes, clarinet; Tineke Postma, alto, soprano sax, flute; Gary Versace, acoustic piano; Ed Howard, acoustic bass; Matt Wilson, Montez Coleman, drums; Rogerio Boccatto, percussion.



By Clive Griffin

If you share the idea that an album, a jazz album, that entertains and moves you is the result of the confluence of heartfelt performances by sensitive and experienced creative artists, a relaxed intensity at all tempos, enlightened solos, compelling compositions, deft arrangements, delightful musical dialogue, all in a superb warm audio recording, thoughtfully mixed—then the twelve tracks on vocalist Chris McNulty's new album, *Whispers The Heart* will provide a wonderful journey.

McNulty opens with Michel Legrand's "Summer Me, Winter Me." This is one of several arrangements by guitarist Bollenback for the recording. It opens as a jazz waltz, and blossoms into a medium swing in 4/4 time. McNulty's intonation and articulation are commanding—and provide a preview for the level of musical excellence and creative artistry with which she leads throughout the album. Tineke Postma turns in an impressive solo on soprano sax, as well as the brief responses behind McNulty's musings.

Bollenback's arrangement of the Harold Arlen classic "Come Rain or Come Shine" is another super medium groover. McNulty scats and she is marvelous. Whether singing the lyrics or improvising, McNulty demonstrates a commanding sense of rhythm that is evident in the way that she bends rhythms, syncopating phrases in unexpected ways and, in general, floats over the foundation provided by the music and the accompanists. Dave Pietro is featured on tenor sax. His big sound brings you right into the music, and then he soars throughout the range of the horn, lithely infusing the solo with a wealth of ideas. Pietro is also the arranger of the next track, Leonard Bernstein's "Lonely Town." The arrangement is noteworthy for his warm and wonderful orchestration using flute, clarinet, alto sax, and flugelhorn. Without slighting McNulty, the arrangement makes the performance a stand-out.

Guitarist Paul Bollenback arranged the the Sammy Cahn, Alex Stordahl standard "I Should Care." Following a gentle solo guitar introduction, McNulty enters rubato over Bollenback's soft and colorful chording. The rhythm section led by Versace on piano, bassist Howard and Montez Coleman transport the group into a medium swing groove. McNulty is relaxed and easily glides over the accompaniment, expressing the lyrics with aplomb. Versace solos magnificently, albeit briefly, wrapping up with big fat, foot-stomping block chords.

McNulty slows down the pace with a rendition of her own "Lullabye For A Young Boy." Ingrid Jensen solos first. She plays a soft, pensive improvisation on harmon-muted trumpet. Her magnificent long tones and simple motifs

are everything that the piece needs to complement the intensity of McNulty's voice on this ballad.

"When Love Was You and Me," is the album closer. Abbey Lincoln wrote the lyrics to this more obscure composition by Thad Jones. It's just McNulty and Bollenback on this one. Bollenback's accompaniment sensitively supports McNulty's stylings—capturing and responding with feathery lightness to her subtle delivery. Brings the album to a quiet and passionate close. Bravo!

The album is a cornucopia of all those abstract elements that identify a great performance, and a consummately musical album. What are those elements? They are what enable the music, that is otherwise nothing more than notes on paper, and a few people that show up with musical instruments to play, and whose names later appear on an album jacket, to tap into a certain energy stream and resonate together in extraordinary ways. That's what happens here on Chris McNulty's *Whispers The Heart*.