

AUSTRALIA.NET - Chris' review of the Leigh Carriage album

On first listening it's clear that this recording project will speak to listeners outside the mainstream, jazz realm. That's not to say certain aspects and soloistic choices don't speak with a jazz voice - there's plenty of that here. This is Ms. Carriage's first writing and collaborative outing. Considering this entire project was put together in less than 6 weeks, all while juggling a full time teaching position at Southern Cross University where Carriage is vocal director, this album has an almost seamless flow and ethereal quality to it. It's an outstanding, creative accomplishment.

I really like the choice of opening with **Mandarine Skyline** which has a lovely forward motion. The choice of doubling trumpet and guitar sets the scene for the entry of Ms. Carriage's gorgeous voice and story telling. Her's is a voice with crystal clear delivery, a perfectly lovely instrument. Her registers connect smoothly and she transitions to her high register effortlessly. The playing is outstanding. The way trumpeter, Phil Slater and guitarist, Matt Smith hear off each other, sets the tone of the album. The rhythm section of Jonathan Zwartz and Hamish Stuart is solid throughout, providing the perfect platform for Carriage's vocals and soloists. A lovely flugel solo from Slater, accompanied by Steve Russell's ostinato type piano figures keeps the momentum going, perfectly. I like the way the arrangement moves dynamically, winding down to that finally bass note.

In **Rise and Fall**, we get to hear the sublime piano treatments of Matt McMahon, along with some beautiful sonic and coloristic contributions from guitarist, Matt Smith. Leigh weaves lovely, melodic twists and turns across the lyric, speaking her own deep truth about the journey of love. **I'm not Leaving** continues this thread and appears to be the one composition that was written solely by Ms. Carriage, and it's a powerful one. Steve Russell's beautiful touch and opening repeat figure draws the listener in to ready them for the magic of Leigh's story telling. The honesty and tenderness in her voice as she speaks of love lost, loss endured is deeply moving. Lovely solo by Matt Smith. I like the change of groove in **Keep It To The Letter** which adds a jump to the proceedings, dancing along through to a blues inflected solo from Smith. Some very fine playing and comping from Sam Keevers. In **All While You Sleep**, I hear touches of Eva Cassidy but this song especially, shows off Carriage's flawless technique, once again featuring an exquisite musical exchange between trumpet and guitar. The dynamic climbs to a beautifully realized ending where the voice soars and then drops off to a soft and sparse conversation piece between voice and trumpet, allowing for the beautiful touch of piano and guitar to make the final statement.

Breaking Point opens with a pulse that remains constant throughout the piece. I like

the way it stays there for the guitar solo. At some point I thought I was wanting to hear a change of pattern, especially from the bass but the vibe definitely sticks with you, right through to an excellent bass solo from Jonathan Zwartz. Once again Carriage leads and reads the ebb and flow of the dynamic perfectly. That driving pulse becomes the perfect vehicle for her to take off and bring things down to a memorable ending. **Watermark** breaks up the pace nicely before moving to **Refuge** which ends up being one of my favorite tracks. Gorgeous breath control and pitch from Carriage is matched stunningly by Phil Slater and Matt Smith. The call and response between voice and trumpet adds such a beautiful touch. As the melodic construct develops and harmony is added, a feeling of refuge is created for the listener as the song opens up for another gorgeous trumpet solo, dressed with some lovely guitar accompaniment. The voice ending unaccompanied and unexpectedly is beautifully rendered. It has a touch of the ending of Wayne Shorter's, "Shere Khan the Tiger." **Lost Sons** as the lyric implies, speaks about the loss of a son for a mother and father. It speaks of heartbreak and courage, beauty and love, grief and hope as does this stunning debut from a vocalist-composer who I'm sure we're going to hear a lot more from in the future. A wonderfully realized, collaborative effort by an outstanding ensemble headed by a gifted vocalist.