



# Album Spotlight

# Greta Matassa

Vocalist Greta Matassa Looks Beyond the Standard for Her New Album "Favorites From a Long Walk"

By Todd Matthews

**A**fter performing more than a decade, singer Greta Matassa has earned a reputation as one of the top jazz vocalists in the Pacific Northwest. Her live performances at Bakes Place and Tula's are popular events for fans interested in soulful melodies and familiar standards that are Matassa's hallmarks.

For her new album, *Favorites From a Long Walk* (Origin Records, 2005), which hit record stores in November, Matassa has looked beyond the standards and unearthed more than a dozen overlooked—yet timelessly classic—jazz tunes: 'Inside a Silent Tear' recorded by Carmen McRae, 'Double Rainbow' by Antonio Carlos Jobim, and 'He's Gone Again' recorded by Shirley Horn stand out on the album. Favorites also reminds Seattle jazz audiences why they are so fortunate to live in a region with so much talent, as the album brings together Matassa, bassist Clipper Anderson, saxophonist Richard Cole, trumpeter Thomas Marriott, pianist Darin Clendenin, and drummer Mark Ivester.

The new album is a departure of sorts: it's the first solo studio album for Matassa in more than a decade, when she recorded *If the Moon Turns Green* (Matassa Music, 1994); the album also reflects a more contemporary song selection—whereas Matassa has largely stuck with jazz standards from the 1930s through the 1950s on her albums *All This and Heaven Too* (Origin Records, 2003) and *Two for the Road* (Origin Records, 2003), this time she turns to the soulful, 1960s-era tunes that recall McRae, Wilson, Shirley Horn, and Anita O'Day.

**Todd Matthews:** Tell me about the song selection on your new album *Favorites From a Long Walk*.

**Greta Matassa:** About four or five years ago, I started taking these long walks from where I live in West Seattle down to Alki Beach. I would wear headphones and listen to Carmen McRae or Anita O'Day. I don't know if this is true about other people, but when you take a walk wearing headphones, it's sort of an intimate experience with music. It's almost like you have a soundtrack to your life for a couple minutes. It's a very cool feeling. Some of these songs were my soundtrack while I was walking. Some of them were just so uplifting that I thought, 'Well, I better write that one down. That's one I've got to have. I just started to avidly mine for tunes that struck me. I know so many standards, I was really looking for songs that I had never heard before.

**TM:** Though there are some exceptions, most of the songs on the album are uplifting and filled with hope.

**GM:** Things are going good for me right now, so I'm a happy person. It totally amazes and fascinates me how music can affect you: when you hear a song that kind of makes your heart beat a little faster, and you look out and feel really good about things. I'm just as susceptible as anybody. If it raises the hair on my arm, I know I'm listening to a good piece of music. That was the ultimate criteria. It had to have that quality. That said, the tune 'He's Gone Again,' what a piece of music. I didn't really know too much about the composition. I was surfing around looking for all the Shirley Horn I could lay my hands on. I found an obscure CD that you would never find in the record stores. It wasn't on Amazon. It was called *Garden of the Blues*, and it was a suite of music that she performed at a live concert. That song was on it, as well as three others that I almost put on this album. They're just epic pieces of music. They sing themselves. They're not predictable. I think that one in particular is such an effective piece. It's devastating, really. It's not all uplifting.

**TM:** What were the reactions of the other musicians on the album when you told them about the songs you wanted to record? It must have been a treat for them to record songs that maybe they haven't performed in awhile.

**GM:** Well, that's another criteria for me when I'm working on material and bringing it into rehearsals. I do trust my own instincts, but I definitely want to bounce things off other musicians. If they ask, 'Where did you get this piece of music?' then I know I was right. Generally, if they don't say anything, then I kind of have my doubts and think maybe it's not such a great thing after all. But they didn't say that about any of these. And Darren Clendenin is such a subtle pianist, these songs lend themselves very well to his kind of playing. He's got such a light touch on the piano. When Darren and Clipper got together—that's basically how we rehearsed, the three of us as the core rhythm section—I would hear those two read each other's minds as to where they were going to go with voicing. To have an armature like these songs to begin with, and then let them start going even

further with them, it was a joy. What they did with 'Double Rainbow,' it was so light and effortless. I just felt like I could soar over the top of them. It was great fun.

**TM:** What are some of the differences between your last albums, *Two For the Road* and *All This and Heaven Too*, and the new album?

**GM:** The last three albums were recorded live. This album was recorded in the studio. I'm a very spontaneous performer. I love to perform live. I like the sound of live albums. I also love the spontaneity of leaving something, flaws and all, on a recording. The last two albums were a fun experience that way, and I think they do capture what I'm like live. But the nature of recording live means you don't have a chance to go back and fix anything. There's just more control in an environment like this. Ironically, we didn't end up going back and fixing all that much. I think just knowing that we could, it helped us to kind of relax and just enjoy things. I think it's a fine line artistically between what is a flaw and what is construed as an artistic accident that, later on, is very interesting. When you are in the studio and you have those capabilities, you need to know when to take the brush away from the canvas and leave it alone. In a certain way, I kind of wanted to wait until I was mature enough to really feel like I could make those decisions. I think I did a pretty good job of knowing when it was done.

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