

Ivory&Gold

Liner notes: *Journeys*

JACD1027

When we chose the tunes for *Journeys*, Anne and I wanted to take the time to re-explore some favorites of both ours and fans of *Ivory&Gold*. Although many of the titles will be familiar to followers of our duo, the renditions herein bear little if any resemblance to our initial recordings of these pieces.

The strongest illustration of my above assertion is our new *I Got Rhythm*. We stay true to the song's stage origin with a dramatic introduction from the bridge to the end of the song. Then, as Fats would aver, it's time for "Tempo de Tear-Ass." What the listener will notice on this track, and throughout the album, is Anne's ever-increasing comfortability and inventiveness when it comes to improvising. We have a great time trading fours—sharing the center stage on a chorus and making up "musical conversations" back and forth—on this and several tunes on *Journeys*. *I Got Rhythm* has become an anthem jam tune for jazz ensembles large and small, traditional and modern; a long way from its inclusion in 1930's show *Girl Crazy* as a vehicle for Ethel Merman and the Foursome.

We then move to a swinging (purists BEWARE!) version of Joplin's *The Entertainer*. Huge volumes have been written about this piece and its impact on American music, so we'll just suffice it to say that once I heard Dick Wellstood's bluesy version, I felt emboldened to approach this seminal rag in a personal way. Anne swings along playfully and we keep to the adage "Please the audience and get invited back" by returning to the favorite first section of the rag to conclude.

We are always searching for those beautiful, heart-grabbing tunes that will highlight Anne's rich, golden tone. Our first ballad is a new one for us but a favorite for generations. When David Gates of the rock group *Bread* penned the soaring love-song *If*, it was such a big hit that even Telly Savalas recorded a *Sprechstimme* version!! Anne simply states the melody and our good friend, world-class engineer Jack Miller, gives the track a truly ethereal sound. We were all speechless at the end and hope that this version transports you as well.

More Gershwin with our new rendition of *Oh, Lady Be Good!* From the show with a similar title (just omit the "O"), this is another favorite Gershwin ditty for jazz instrumentalist and vocalist alike. Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra, some 25-30 musicians, recorded the first hit of the song. We number only two, but try to give it enough variety that you won't miss the other two-dozen players!!

Autumn Leaves has become something of a signature piece for *Ivory&Gold* and it seemed fitting to include it to showcase once again the huge musical distance Anne has traveled since our first recording of it. Here her improvisations are more assured and we are much more playful with it, although we have toned down the tempo to bring out the inherent romance of the harmonic and melodic sequences. We also include the rarely heard verse this time around. Our instrumental version could really be called "Les Feuilles Mortes" as the US version from 1950, with English lyrics by Johnny Mercer, used the French melody note-for-note.

1911 was a great year for Irving Berlin and popular music in general with the publication of *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. Although as written the song contains no ragtime rhythms, the tune is simple enough that we can add ample syncopation to it. While Berlin was quoted in the 1950's as saying that he never did understand "that ragtime stuff" he certainly had a handle on giving the public what they wanted. This infectious tune sets the toes and other body parts of even those who are unfamiliar with it tapping with abandon! The song was still being used in films including Berlin's music 43 years after its publication. Concerning the publication of the sheet music it eventually reached over 1,000,000 copies sold and had sixty-five individual performers' photos featured in cameos on separate sheet covers. From the success of this one song, Berlin was able to leave the Ted Snyder Publishing Co. and start his own venture. Anne and I launch into a swingier version than we have performed and recorded in the past, bringing out the versatility of this immortal tune.

Two Berlin songs back to back? Why not!! He wrote over 1,500 tunes so we have 1,498+ to go! Another huge hit in its day, *Blue Skies* literally stopped the show when it debuted in the show, *Betsy*. This must have upset composers Rodgers and Hart, who penned the rest of the tunes in this musical! Its inclusion was the result of leading lady Belle Baker's insistence that Berlin write a song to feature her. A standard that has been covered in virtually every style, it provides us with a chance to be playful and share ideas back and forth once again.

Other than the aria *Summertime* (found on *My Funny Valentine*, JACD1012), Abdullah Ibrahim's deep, sonorous, ringing anthem *Water From An Ancient Well* is our most requested song. We find performing this tune to be transporting. The piece speaks for itself so I'll say nothing here except a word of encouragement to anyone who wishes to explore Ibrahim's music further. Whether as a soloist or bandleader, this brilliant South African pianist creates truly unique and beautiful sounds when performing his compositions.

Another stalwart from the *Ivory&Gold* songbook, *Pennies From Heaven* receives new treatment here with a looser swing, some trading fours, and Anne taking on a real leadership role in her improvisations. All I can say here is that we had a real fun time playing around with this one. This song was not written for the stage but rather for a movie with the same name. By 1936, the US was making the slow climb back towards prosperity but the sentiment of the lyrics reveal that the hard times endured during the Depression were still, and would be for decades, foremost in people's mind.

Blue Goose Rag is a special piece for Anne and me as it is the first rag on which we imposed our individuality. Unique among rags, this piece features great syncopation in the first two sections but eliminates all the ragtime rhythms in the rhapsodic C section. We have performed this piece pretty much the same way over the last 10 years, although Anne throws in much more virtuosity on the final choruses. Metaphorically, this rag is one of our favorite revisited locations and never fails to please the audience!

Our interpretation of the sultry *Mahna de Carnaval* has changed a great deal over the years. We have mellowed our performance to highlight the truly romantic nature of the song. During this one, sway with a loved one and have your own carnival!!

The perennial *Ain't Misbehavin'* found its way into the studio and on the radio dozens of times during composer Fats Waller's short but illustrious career. A favorite for stride pianists, it pops up at almost every jam session (along with its sister tune, *Honeysuckle Rose*) and is also featured on nearly every concert Ivory&Gold performs. Even audiences unfamiliar with Waller in particular (or jazz in general) respond favorably to the irrepressible lyrics, the lilting melody and the impish harmonies. The subject matter (a sort of anti-*carpe-diem* theme) wandered into several of Waller's compositions, perhaps as an *apologia* for his actual behavior! *Ain't Misbehavin'* first found the public in the Broadway show *Hot Chocolates* and was presented by Louis Armstrong in his Broadway debut. How could it miss?

There are several interesting things to point out regarding our new tune *Fly Me to the Moon*. First, the original title was *In Other Words* but when the song became a standard on radio and television during the 50's and 60's it became known by the opening words of the chorus. Second, it is note-for-note the same as one of Anne's daily warm-up exercises. I overheard her going through it one morning and said "How great, you're playing one of the most popular songs ever written. We should add it to the act." She queried, "Add my exercise to our repertoire?" Once I revealed what she was playing it was a very short time before she was belting out the tune. We keep our arrangement very loose, so each time the tune takes on a new flavor. We liked this version best to include on the recording and it has since become one of our "enticing new destinations."

No matter which wild rags, irreverent comedy tunes or hot swingers we present to an audience, it always turns out that Anne's way with a ballad produces the most acclaim, so we needed to be sure and include another aria-like standard for Anne to caress with her pure, gorgeous tone. Here we explore the nuances of Gershwin's masterpiece, *Someone to Watch Over Me*. This song was pretty sophisticated for 1926, when it appeared in the Broadway show *Oh, Kay!* with star Gertrude Lawrence doing the vocal honors. Gershwin himself performed it as one of his few recorded piano solos.

Our first recorded Duke Ellington song is a favorite of musician and listener alike and sums up (along with *I Got Rhythm*) my personal philosophy of music--and perhaps life in general. It's great fun to urge an audience to join us on the "Doo-wah, Doo-wah" part of the chorus. Feel free to make like Ivie Anderson and try it at home! Gm happens to be one of Anne's favorite keys so here she plays with real abandon. With a surprise ending, we conclude this journey and are already looking down the road to future adventures with long-time musical favorites and heretofore undiscovered gems! As always, we extend our heartfelt thanks to YOU, dear listener, for taking the time to listen to us either on recording or in person. Hope to see you soon!

Jeff Barnhart—May 31, 2012
Mystic, CT