



Jane Monheit

“The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me”

It is a lifelong musical journey from the dreamy innocence of “Never Never Land” to the world-weary delusion of “Something Cool.” Yet, Jane Monheit, now firmly established as one of the post-millennial jazz world’s foremost vocalists, has managed to make the trip in just eight years. In 2000, Monheit chose the sweet, escapist *Peter Pan* lullaby as the title tune for her debut album. Now, with *The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me*, her sophomore release for Concord (following 2006’s sumptuous *Surrender*), she is plumbing the gin-soaked escapism of the heartrending tune made famous by June Christy in 1953.

But “Something Cool” is just one of several tracks on *The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me*, Monheit’s widest-ranging and most accomplished album to date, that suggest the honey-voiced chanteuse is ushering in an artistic era of heightened sagacity and maturity. She also navigates the dark corners of Tommy Wolf and Fran Landesman’s poignant “The Ballad of the Sad Young Men,” delivers a superlative interpretation of Paul Simon’s bittersweet “I Do It for Your Love” and embraces such contemporary songwriters as Corinne Bailey Rae (“Like A Star”) and Fiona Apple (“Slow Like Honey”). “I was,” confesses Monheit, “obsessed with Fiona Apple’s first record when I was in college, and that’s the album that song is from. I thought it was interesting to do it and “Like A Star” because both are by female songwriters who are almost exactly my age, and they’re songs I really love. I’m always doing songs from the Great American Songbook by long-dead composers, mostly male. Standards are still where my heart is, but it’s great to go beyond that.”

And, of course, *The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me*, produced by Matt Pierson, does include a rich assortment of jazz and pop classics, ranging from Cole Porter (“Get Out of Town”) and Jimmy Dorsey (“I’m Glad There Is You”) to Leonard Bernstein (“Lucky to Be Me”). Nor does Monheit ignore her deep adoration for Brazilian gems, adding Ivan Lins’ “Acaso” (“No Tomorrow”) and the effervescent samba “A Primeira Vez” to her recorded repertoire.

The album’s powerful, glorious maturity can, Monheit agrees, be linked to the fact that the past year has been a significant one for her, with the celebration of her 30th birthday and the birth of her and husband Rick Montalbano’s first child, a son named Jack. “Because I’m a little older,” she explains, “I did something different with this record. In the past, I always chose tunes that were very truthful to me and would be believable coming from a woman of my age. But for this album, I decided to step out and play a few characters and sing some lyrics that aren’t necessarily from my own life experience, but that I’m now mature enough to understand.”

The disc's title is instantly recognizable as a line from "Rainbow Connection," the sweetly optimistic Muppets tune that closes the album. "I was actually having trouble coming up with a title," says Monheit, "so I asked for advice from a friend of mine and within seconds he said, 'call it *The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me.*' I was like, 'oh my Lord, that is the most perfect thing I've ever heard,' because I'm playing these different characters on the record and coming from these different points of view. Every song isn't about me. So this cast of characters is the lovers, the dreamers and me. Some of the songs are utterly appropriate to my own point of view, but others like "Something Cool" and "I Did It for Your Love" are things I haven't lived."

The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me was actually created in two parts. Four of the tracks — "I'm Glad There Is You," "Get Out of Town," "No Tomorrow," and "Lucky to Be Me" — were done while Monheit was still pregnant. They were recorded with various combinations of her regular bandmates — pianist Michael Kanan and bassist Neal Miner, plus Montalbano on drums — alongside such guest artists as saxophonist Seamus Blake and guitarist Frank Vignola. "It was," she recalls, "a really neat feeling to be in the studio with my son in there with me, singing beautiful tunes like "I'm Glad There Is You" and "Lucky to Be Me." It was a very sentimental thing. The great thing about "I'm Glad There Is You" is that the lyrics for the bridge are about starting a new chapter of your life with the person you love, and that's what Rick and I are going through right now." For "Lucky to Be Me," Monheit opted to record just with Kanan, because "Michael and I have been playing that song together for years. We actually recorded it once before, on a duo record we made as a Christmas present for friends and family. It wasn't released or anything. We just got studio time in New York about three years ago and then burned copies as gifts. That was my favorite track on that record, and it's certainly my favorite thing on this album. It's the *most* heartfelt track. I think the take on the album is the first one we did. Michael and I have such a special thing together. The way we were situated in the studio, we couldn't see each other, but we're totally psychically linked. He is so wonderful. I cannot imagine what my musical world would be like if he weren't there."

Monheit also chose to include "Rainbow Connection," the last song recorded for the album, because of wee Jack. "I sing that song to him and he loves it," she says, adding that she wanted to add it "because it will be so nice to have that documented and be able to say to him, 'I recorded this for you when you were about three months old and it was your favorite song.' It ended up being so cool, with Gil Goldstein playing accordion. Gil arranged it, and it's such a great version. I loved that the modulation is downward instead of up. It's such an interesting thing to do because, rather than making the tune bigger and brighter, it holds you in closer and makes it even more intimate."

The album's second recording session, held after Jack's birth, ushered in an equally stellar team of musicians, including Goldstein on piano, guitarist Romero Lubambo (who provides sole accompaniment on "A Primeira Vez"), drummer Antonio Sánchez, bassist Scott Colley and percussionist Bashiri Johnson. Goldstein also crafted more than half the arrangements, with Lubambo stepping in to arrange the two Brazilian tracks and Kanan shaping "Get Out of Town," "I'm Glad There Is You" and "Lucky to Be Me."

Among Goldstein's brilliant work is a fiery treatment of the Bonnie Raitt anthem "I Ain't Gonna Let You Break My Heart." The song is, says Monheit, "one that I've always wanted to record. Bonnie Raitt has been a huge influence on me since I was a tiny kid, so

I've had that one in my back pocket for years waiting for a chance to do it, and it seemed to fit with the rest of the tunes on the album."

As for Goldstein's stunning spin on Simon's "I Do It for Your Love," Monheit says, "Gil and I agreed we wanted a lot going on in that song, almost like a tumultuous, chaotic feel with a lot of drama, so that the vocal could be very simply stated atop all of this turmoil. And it really came out that way. You feel this tremendous narrative going on underneath, while the person telling the story is holding back a lot of emotion."

While Kanan's "I'm Glad There Is You" and "Lucky to Be Me" are downy soft, his interpretation of "Get Out of Town" is both fervently sexy and charged with empowerment. "It's funny," Monheit remarks. "I recorded that tune with that arrangement for my third album, but didn't use it because I didn't like the way it came out. Michael didn't even write that arrangement for me. He did it as an instrumental chart before he was in my band. I've always loved it, and we've been performing it live forever." As for the track's intense sexiness, she laughingly notes, "Well, you know, I've given birth now, so everybody knows I'm not exactly virginal! And there definitely is a lot of female power going on, too. I love singing it in that way — not overtly sexual, but not shy either; just being very matter-of-fact about it, [suggesting that] 'yes, I'm a mature woman and this is the message I'm sending you, and maybe it's sexy but it's also the truth'."

An enormous Ivan Lins fan ("I pretty much know every song he's ever written," she insists), Monheit is equally enamored of Peter Eldridge (of New York Voices and Moss fame), who was her first and only vocal coach and wrote the title track for her previous album, *Surrender*. How fortunate, then, that she was able to salute both simultaneously. As she explains, "I've always loved Ivan's "Acaso," the original Portuguese version of "No Tomorrow." Peter plays a lot of solo gigs in New York, and I go whenever I can. One night he played ["Acaso"] with this English lyric he had written, and I was like, 'No! Stop it! I can't even wrap my mind around how beautiful this is.' I was so excited to have Ivan's melody and Peter's lyrics, and to have the two guys, whom I worship and who have had such a huge influence on me, come together. It was the most perfect thing ever."

The Lovers, the Dreamers and Me carries a dual dedication: to infant Jack and to the late Joel Dorn, who produced Monheit's first three albums. "There are so many things on this record that Joel would have loved," she muses, "and I included "The Ballad of the Sad Young Men" for him because he had a famous version of it with Roberta [Flack, who included the song on her Dorn-produced, platinum-selling debut album, *First Take*, in 1969]. I learned so much about making records from him. We were very, very close. I saw him one last time before he died, and we talked about a new project we wanted to do together. I literally found out about his death while standing outside the hospital waiting to go in for an ultrasound and hear my baby's heartbeat for the first time. I was on the table crying out of sadness for Joel's loss and for hearing the beat of my son's heart. It was a very surreal experience. So, it just seemed right to dedicate the album to both of them."