

## MELISSA MORGAN CONJURES THE SOUNDS OF OLD-SCHOOL VOCAL JAZZ

**Debut recording, *Until I Met You*, set for release April 28, 2009**

Melissa Morgan is a newcomer with an old-school pedigree. Her earliest exposure to jazz was by way of her grandmother's record collection when she was growing up in Teaneck, New Jersey. Some of the first jazz voices she ever heard from among those old LPs – Billie Holiday, Dinah Washington, Sarah Vaughan, Nancy Wilson – were also some of the greatest.

Two decades after first hearing those classic voices, Morgan's tastes still run to that heyday of the great jazz divas. Her debut recording, *Until I Met You*, scheduled for release on Telarc on April 28, 2009, captures that organic, old-school sensibility and reintroduces it to an entirely new generation of listeners.

"I wanted that classic sound," Morgan explains. "I told the engineer from the very beginning, 'I don't want this to sound too polished or too modern.' There are some places where it's not perfect, but it has such an organic feel to it, and just a raw soul about it, and that's exactly what I wanted."

Morgan is assisted on this first outing by a great crew of musicians. The rhythm section consists of pianist Gerald Clayton, guitarist Randy Napoleon, bassist Joe Sanders and drummer Kevin Kanner. Augmenting the core lineup is the four-piece horn section of trumpeter Christian Scott, alto saxophonist Tim Green, tenor saxophonist Ben Wendel and trombonist Francisco Torres.

"I can't say enough wonderful things about all of them," says Morgan. "A few of the tracks were the first and only takes. We might have done one or two more in some cases, but the ones that ultimately made it onto the record were the first takes, and we didn't touch them. I think that says a lot about us as a group, and how we all get along and how well we play together."

The camaraderie is evident in the music. The opening track to *Until I Met You* is a bold move – a stirring rendition of Nancy Wilson's signature tune, "Save Your Love For Me," featuring Christian Scott on trumpet – but the band supports her at every turn. Morgan recalls being asked whether she was sure she wanted to take on a song associated with such an iconic artist. "It was kind of scary in a way," she admits, "but I really love the tune. We kept it similar to the original, but we did change it a bit. I'm never going to be in league with Nancy Wilson. However, I will always strive to achieve her level of musicianship."

The relaxed and easygoing "Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby," evocative of Billie Holiday's distinctive vocal style, benefits from a moment of spontaneity in the studio. Like the melancholy "I Just Dropped By To Say Hello," which appears much later in the set, "Is You Is" is one of the many first takes that proved to be the best. "We really didn't have an ending on that song," she explains. "I tried to end it earlier, but Gerald kept playing, as though he was saying, 'You're not finished yet.' As a result, it goes a little longer than I had intended, but it was cool and it works. Sometimes you just have to go with the flow."

The brassy and uptempo title track is a full-bodied piece, thanks in large part to a horn arrangement by Torres. "I asked him to do the charts for this track and for 'Yes, I Know When I've Had It,'" says Morgan. "We only had four horns, but I told him I wanted those four horns to sound like a big band. He really made that happen. I think the song is a nice showcase for the horn section."

"I Wonder" takes on a bluesy sensibility, thanks in large part to Randy Napoleon's subtle guitar work. "It's a simple song, but it has a powerful message because it paints such a vulnerable picture," says Morgan. "Someone is thinking about a past love, and their heart is still not yet

completely closed to this person. And that brief little moment when you think about that person in your past is just so emotional. You still wonder where they are and who they're with, and whether they still think of you."

Whether the individual song is bittersweet or lighthearted, Morgan sees the music in general as part of a larger story, one that she's anxious to tell – provided she can do it in a way that's meaningful to the listener.

"With the first record, you want to do everything," she says. "You become very ambitious. But I've learned that you have to be sort of like a film editor. You have to be focused, you have to have a central theme, and the sequence is of utmost importance. You really have to hold the listener the entire way through. I wanted to take the listener on a journey, and show them what I've been through and what's important to me."

Listen to *Until I Met You* and catch the first chapter of Melissa Morgan's promising story.

**Melissa Morgan's *Until I Met You* (CD-83684) is due at retail on April 28, 2009.**

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