

### Concert Review: The Libby York Quartet

The Japanese atmosphere of the lovely Kitano Hotel faded away as the Libby York Quartet took to the stage Wednesday evening. A timeless jazz club suddenly appeared out of the Asian mist. York, elegantly dressed in black, dazzled.

The performance was a bit more melancholy than York's recent album "Memoir", with an even richer atmosphere of saloons and lonely nights. Some of the songs were new to me, such as Neal Hefti's "Girl Talk" and the delightfully seedy "Something Cool" by Billy Barnes. York performed these with relish, referring to the latter as the ultimate song for lounge lizards.

With "Thanks for the Memories", the Chicago-born chanteuse has really taken ownership of this classic, and I hope it will remain one of her standards. She sings it like no one else, with all schmaltz and bonhomie long gone. What is left is a delightful, unabashedly wistful private moment with an old lover. The magical Warren Vache on cornet added some deliciously boozy notes and a few tears of his own before handing it over to pianist John DiMartino, who attempted a gentle dose of cheer before finally giving in to his own heartache. Matt Wind on bass was reflective, yet provided just the right amount of lift to keep the number from becoming maudlin. It was a wonderful essay in melancholy with each player adding a unique chapter to the bittersweet story.

The brightest moments came with Vache joining York in the classic duet "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off". Vache went straight for laughs with improvised lyrics while York tried to rein it in, striving to save the "whole thing". With Vache looking for the exit the entire time, this was no small feat.

Vache has become a lion in the jazz world, and his mischievous glances and quick flashes of humor are almost as entertaining as his lovely cornet. He still experiments with his instrument, and he creates achingly beautiful sounds that seem to linger in the air long after he has set the horn down. DiMartino conjures up memories of Vince Guaraldi when the late pianist wasn't playing for peanuts. His touch is delicate yet strong, with magnificent color and rhythm. His expressive face is engaging and unpredictable. On bass Matt Wind didn't always get a solo, but when he did his tone was rich and clear. He even treated his listeners to some lovely, all-too-seldom-heard artistry with the bow. These musicians clearly love playing with one another. They left the audience at the Kitano wanting more, but surely grateful for the memories.

### Roark Littlefield, Stage Buddy

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### MEMOIR - Libby York Music

Libby York is not a huge name in the jazz world, but those who are familiar with her singing

know her to be an appealing representative of the Cool School. Influenced by Anita O'Day, Chris Connor and June Christy, York does not shout to get your attention. Restraint and understatement prevail throughout *Memoir*, a pleasing effort that finds the Chicago native joined by pianist John di Martino, bassist Martin Wind and drummer Greg Sergo. Guitarist Russell Malone joins on Ralph Ranger-Leon Robin's "Thanks for the Memory", Cy Coleman's "When in Rome" and Roberto Menescal's bossa nova standard "Little Boat" while cornet player Warren Vaché is featured on Jimmy Van Heusen-Johnny Burke's "Put It There, Pal" and George Gershwin's "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off".

For all her subtlety, York brings plenty of feeling to *Memoir*, whether interpreting Cole Porter's "Take Me Back to Manhattan", Frank Loesser's "On a Slow Boat to China", Rube Bloom-Harry Ruby's "Give Me the Simple Life" or "Walk Between the Raindrops" by Donald Fagen. York's sense of humor is evident with some fun male/female banter with Vaché on "Put It There, Pal" and "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off".

Some jazz instrumentalists don't care to work with singers, but thankfully, the musicians York chose are known for their work with vocalists: Malone spent years backing Diana Krall; Vaché played with Rosemary Clooney extensively; and Wind and di Martino have both backed numerous singers in their careers. The overarching melodicism of the band certainly doesn't hurt. In a perfect world, York (who didn't start singing professionally until 35) would have a larger catalogue. But the albums she has recorded have been solid and *Memoir* is no exception.

### **Alex Henderson, New York City Jazz Record**

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### **MEMOIR - Libby York Music**

Maturity and confidence trump youthful enthusiasm every time. Experience and self-assurance are both sexy and smart when in the hands and voice of Chicago-native Libby York, who has that rare ability to take use-worn standards, strip out the sentimentality and present the piece as originally intended. On *Memoir*, York boldly grasps pieces like, "Thanks for the Memory," "On a Slow Boat to China" and "How Long Has This Been Going On," shakes off the dust of nostalgia, recreating them as first intended. It takes a recording like this to demonstrate how a patina of nostalgia can tarnish the surface of a great song. Pianist John J. DiMartino and guitarist Russell Malone melodically soften these arrangements, while cornetist Warren Vache plays and sings (on "Put It There" and "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off"). The duets are playful and vibrant with Vache providing a bit of sepia tone with his cornet. York achieves a certain relaxed perfection in her singing, one that can only have come from a love of the repertoire and its performance.

### **C. Michael Bailey, All About Jazz**

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### **MEMOIR - Libby York Music**

Every so often a CD comes along that seems to have everything you want. Tunes and lyrics

by the grand craftsmen of Tin Pan Alley, instrumental breaks by sympathetic musicians, and a singer who can interpret the GASbook in the vocal traditions created by such as Ella, Peggy, Billie, Anita, Frank etc and yet retain his/her individuality. This is just such a disc!

Where do I begin?

Well there are the songs - Give Me the Simple Life; When in Rome; Put it There Pal; Thanks For the Memory; Take Me Back to Manhattan; I Was Doing Alright; My Little Boat; Let's Call the Whole Thing Off; On a Slow Boat to China; How Long Has This Been Going on?; Walk Between the Raindrops - if I'd had to pick out the set list myself at least half of these would have been on it!

And the musicians. Warren Vaché on cornet, the best thing since sliced Braff, is so perfect for this type of set up. I have fond memories of a weekend at the Breda Jazz Festival back in 1982. I loved every minute of those few days and listening to Warren, (was he Warren Vaché Jr. back then?) in the company of Guy Lafitte and Bob Wilber, contributed to some of those memories. Warren also duets vocally with Libby on a couple of numbers. How ironic that one of the numbers on this disc should be Thanks For The Memory with Vaché's cornet outstanding - he's certainly outgrown the junior tag! On guitar Russell Malone is another ace in this stacked deck. John DiMartino is great on piano although his predilection for the "a fish is an animal that swims in a brook" quote - he does it at least 3 times - perhaps partially undermines his creativity!

Now we come to Libby York. Her fourth album - how many have Krall, Monheit and co made? York should have at least a dozen on the shelves! She hasn't, so make the most of this one. We're hardly into March 2014 but this is the one the pack's chasing.

You can catch her on March 26 at the Tennessee Williams Cabaret Theatre, Key West, Florida - excuse me, I got to go book an airline ticket...

*Lance.*

*PS: Today is my birthday and THIS is the best present I've had - beats the Chevrolet hands down!*

**Lance, Bebop Spoken Here**

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**MEMOIR - Libby York Music**

There are a lot of wonderful female vocalists on the scene today, and one of the best is LIBBY YORK. *Memoir* (Libby York Music - No Catalog Number) finds her in excellent company with Warren Vaché on cornet, John di Martino on piano, Russell Malone on guitar, Martin Wind on bass and Greg Sergo on drums. York is a singer who can take familiar tunes like "Give Me the Simple Life," "Thanks for the Memory," "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" or "How Long Has This Been Going On," and make them sound fresh. She is a wonderful interpreter of lyrics, and phrasing should be her middle name. Vaché is, as I have written countless times, as good as it gets. In addition, he contributes some nifty vocalizing on "Put It There, Pal." And "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off." If asked to list the first call piano accompanists, you could

not omit the imaginative di Martino. Malone simply swings with the best of them. Having Wind and Sergio anchoring the rhythm section is an added bonus. This is Libby York's fourth album, and she has recorded another winner.

**Joe Lang, JerseyJazz**

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### **MEMOIR - Libby York Music**

With the assistance of pianist John DiMartino on arrangements, producer and leader Libby York offer up a real classic slice of traditional jazz. This is the Great American Songbook done in a style that is respectful, reverent and totally true to form. Being an artist, York takes certain liberties with phrasing and structure but delivers in a manner that pays homage to the greats such as Rosemary Clooney, Annie Ross, Peggy Lee and Ella Fitzgerald. There are no real surprises with this record and no disconcerting curves thrown. It's just sturdy and dependable songs lovingly handled with care and polished to perfection.

"Give Me the Simple Life" kicks off the track list and kind of exemplifies the whole mood of the album at the same time. York has an easy going and relaxed approach that totally will relieve what ails you. She alters time and space ever so slightly while the band responds with a mild and carefree swing. The amusing travelogue "When in Rome (I Do As the Romans Do)" follows and features superb vocal dexterity and enunciation, flanked by Russell Malone's exquisite solo guitar and Warren Vache's delicate horn embellishments. Jimmy Van Heusen's delightful "Put It There, Pal" is a fun one that finds York and Vache sparring comical asides and vocal improvs together. They are, indeed, artistic compadres that exhibit a ton of good humor and simpatico here. "Take Me Back to Manhattan" is a love letter to NYC and the 1930's show tune is topped off by DiMartino's elegant piano and Vache's soulful cornet. Gershwin's "I Was Doing Alright" continues that air of urbane sophistication via the leader's highly stylized vocals and the rhythm section's light, yet driving swing. The mood changes slightly with the introduction of the sambafueled "My Little Boat." The band arrangement and interplay is smooth and transparent, allowing York to really get inside the melody and rework it a bit. Her phrasing here is romantically entrancing and magical. Some other tunes of note include another Gershwin gem "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" and Donald Fagen's modern jazz classic "Walk Between the Raindrops." With the first piece, Vache, once again, vocally duets with York and recalls the charming and comedic musician-actor Jack Sheldon. The second and final track on the album was originally composed by Steely Dan's Donald Fagen for a solo project called The Nightfly. This was a good call by York as the light hearted cadence and chord structure of the piece fit in extremely well with the rest of the, mostly, Tin Pan Alley fare.

Libby York is a fine singer, arranger and band leader. Her rapport with the group is so engagingly palpable you'll wish you were in the studio absorbing their musically vibrant and positive energy live.

**Eric Harabadian, Jazz Inside Magazine**

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## **MEMOIR - Libby York Music**

While Diana Krall continues to top vocal polls and rack up platinum album sales, Chicagoan Libby York remains comparatively obscure. So consider this open invitation to all Krall fans to dip into York's meager-just four albums across 15 years-but mighty oeuvre. *Memoir*, a terrific collection of standards, is an ideal place to start. What you'll discover is an interpreter who is not only every inch Krall's equal but also bears a strong vocal resemblance to the Canadian superstar: warm, intimate and imbued with a fogbound sexiness.

York has always demonstrated superb taste in both song selection and side-men. Here, traveling from a tender "How Long Has This Been Going On?" and a sly "When in Rome" to a shimmering "My Little Boat" and sprightly "Walk Between the Raindrops," she is seamlessly supported by pianist John di Martino (her co-arranger on all 11 tracks), bassist Martin Wind, drummer Greg Sergo and cornet player Warren Vache. Guitarist Russell Malone joins on three tracks, including a misty "Thanks for the Memory," and Vache twice contributes vocal accompaniment, adding gravel-filled joy to "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" and a cleverly updated take on the Bing Crosby-Bob Hope chestnut "Put It There, Pal."

**Christopher Loudon, JazzTimes**

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## **MEMOIR - Libby York Music**

It's hard to imagine a voice more suited to classic jazz standards than that of Libby York. Listening to this throaty, laid-back chanteuse easing her way through "Take Me Back To Manhattan", you can almost see the cigarette smoke and catch the aroma of spilled bourbon in a beautifully lived-in jazz club, the kind that perhaps no longer exists.

In its best moments, York's new album, "*Memoir*", sounds like something the singer and her damn talented companions did for themselves, not caring too much whether anyone else might wander into the joint. They toss back some more gin and pick it up again, vibrating with soul as the clock on the wall eases its way towards two in the morning. The record starts off strong with a witty performance of "Give Me The Simple Life". It's jaunty, effortless, and as in so many of the tracks on "*Memoir*" made all the more enjoyable by York's generous habit of passing it off to her mates for a few bars. After they add their own delectable flourishes, it's all the more pleasurable when she comes back in again.

Strong, too, is the eminently recognizable tune "Thanks For The Memories", a stoic, smiling-through-the-tears tune that was unfortunately made corny and insipid by its decades-long warbling by Bob Hope. She reminds us what a great meditation it is, a happy/sad reflection on a relationship long gone. It's truly a classic, and York's is the best rendition I've heard in years.

York is justly known for her great control and confident phrasing. She also has the ability to create a vocal shade that implies a broad grin while she sings. It's occasionally charming, sometimes a bit much, but in the best tracks on this album, she sets this aside and bares her heart.

The most disappointing track is the Crosby tribute "Put It There, Pal", a duet sung with Warren

Vache in which most of the time is spent exchanging cutesy banter such as "Shall we dance? ...No, I got my girdle on tonight!" and other Bing-esque jibes. When Louis Armstrong and other singers made this kind of thing work, it was because it was spice, not the whole dish. Somewhat less interesting, too, is "My Little Boat", a fairly obscure and forgettable song. But the weaker songs are not only few, but also mercifully short, whereas the best songs are given a lot of time.

The best performance on the album, the Gershwin classic "How Long Has This Been Going On?", is simply magnificent, an aching rendition that really takes its time, and in this song York is at her most vulnerable. In fact, it is the vulnerability in her voice that is most gripping. It's even more appealing than the laid-back confidence she has in spades. It moves the listener into a poetic and gorgeously melancholy realm that is simply blissful. Confidence is great in jazz, but vulnerability and heartache is what gives it its beautiful sting.

I cannot find fault with any of the playing of York's mates, and she gives them plenty of play time. Vache is truly great on the cornet, often pained and reflective, and John DiMartino appears in many of "Memoir's" numbers with delicate piano playing that is a perfect accompaniment to York's vocals. When these musicians match her sensitivity and ache, "Memoir" really glows. The rest of the time it's still a fine evening in a great old club off a rainy street sometime close to two am.

### **Roark Littlefield, StageBuddy**

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"...with a voice like amber--dense, rich and imbued with an enchanting hint of smokiness--York proves that simple beauty is often the most stunning."

**Christopher Loudon, JazzTimes**

"As befits her acknowledged influences, Chris Connor and June Christy, York's is an intimate, conversational style, with the Great American Songbook her natural habitat. It's a laid-back approach, ideal for her dark, mature voice, impeccable phrasing and irrefragable swing.

Given that the small group here is based around Howard Alden (guitar) and Warren Vache (cornet), with just bass and drums, it's no surprise that they groove so well, turning such songs as "Look For the Silver Lining," "The Things We Did Last Summer," "You Go To My Head" and "I Love Being Here With You" into sunny, warm experiences.

The closest she comes to angst is the feeling of a "that's life" shrug she imparts to "For All We Know," one of three polished duets with guitarist Russell Malone, and a fine "But Beautiful" with Alden and Vache (who is in great form throughout the album)."

**Ray Comisky, The Irish Times**

"Another example of a premier artist who displays it through restraint rather than excessiveness is Libby York, whose new CD Here With You (Libby York) shows it's possible to refresh any tune, even such frequently performed compositions as "But Beautiful," "Flamingo" and "For All We Know." Still, as inviting as York's treatments of these numbers prove, she's

even more appealing doing "The Day The World Stopped Turning," "Azure Te (Paris Blues)" or "I Love Being Here With You."

On these she not only beautifully delivers the lyrics, she takes the listener right into the song through her exposition. These numbers only work if the vocalist can really make the person hearing them believe them, and York's expressive, rich and striking voice has that ability. It also helps that she has several top musicians backing her, especially guitarist Howard Alden (also the primary arranger) and Russell Malone, and cornetist Warren Vache (who also backs her vocally on "Walkin' My Baby Back Home"). Though York doesn't venture into the rock or pop arena on Here With You, what she does cover is done with grace and passion."

**Ron Wynn, Nashville City Paper**

"Ms. York is a jazz singer of cool composure and artful subtlety, as she demonstrates on her fine new album, "Here With You."

**Nate Chinen, New York Times**

"...an intimate, richly textured singing voice and warm casual radiance." **Variety**

"Ms. York deliver[s] another peerless recording"

**Alan Bargebuhr, Cadence, the Independent Journal of Creative Improvised Music.**

**\* \* \* \* 4 Stars**

"This CD, rich with the scent of smoke rings and martinis, could possibly bring back Chesterfields (though probably not vermouth). Stylish and cosmopolitan with a broad streak of lush life urbanity, Libby York has a sound that recalls, without any condescension or gratuitous nostalgia, the slightly world weary, been around the block ennui of post war Anita O'Day, Chris Connor and Sarah Vaughn. It was a sharp contrast to the pre-war ingenues whose perky optimism characterized the swing band singers. And it wears well indeed. York offers what is more or less a salute to Sinatra. In these swank moorings she rises to her considerable best, discreetly accompanied by pianist Renee Rosnes. Wess is always a delight, providing a warm jazz sensibility to complement York's slightly husky elegance."

**John McDonough, Downbeat Magazine**

"Delectable... bravura dexterity... simultaneously recalls the cool self assurance of June Christy and the caress of Edie Adams."

**Christopher Loudon, JazzTimes**

"Wow! I love this CD! The program of songs is great, and the performance is so enjoyable! Is this a rave review? I hope so, one is intended."

**Jack Simpson, Jazz on the Beach, WUCF Orlando**

"A really nice package throughout - choice cuts sung impeccably with 'Her Rosnes' and the 'courtiers doing their expected super job'".

**Carroll Coates, co-composer /lyricist Sunday in New York**

"York is from the cool school of June Christy, and Peggy Lee... January in Rockefeller Center when you have the rink to yourself. You're alive. The air is cool. She's ice dancing and you're

in love."

**Dick Crockett, The Voice 88.7 FM Sacramento**

"Carrying its emotional power in its graceful reserve, her voice finds the perfect complement in Frank Wess' sensuous tenor lines...the "cool school" vocal tradition that Libby York keeps simmering in the 21st century...effortless."

**Neil Tesser, MilesAhead Jazz from Chicago**

"This album caught my attention not only with the sweet renderings of York, but with the self assurance bred of complete confidence in her ability as a master vocalist with a deep well of talent at her disposal... In a word, I dug it."

**John Gilbert, Jazz Review**

"Libby can sing!"

**Ron Gill, Jazz Gallery, WGBH Boston**

"Quite a beautiful recording."

**Chris Heim, WBEZ Chicago**

"Dreamy, fabulous, warm, great intonation, super photos and dashing liner notes."

**Linda Yohn, WEMU Ann Arbor**

"York is relaxed , subtle, and infinitely tender, especially on the ballads...you can hear the smile in her voice."

**Judith Schlesinger, ALL ABOUT JAZZ**

"Libby is one of my favorite jazz vocalists. She's incredibly well-versed in jazz standards yet can do bebop, too. She has a classy, dignified presence and connects well with the audience. She's very special to me as a singer. There's a lot of people that perform here, but she's one of my favorites."

**Steve Delisi, Arts Programmer, Chicago Cultural Center**

"Libby York is a great vocalist. She's got a swinging jazz sound. York grabs the attention and people immediately relate to her. She's a major player in the jazz vocalist world."

**Tom Verhey, Owner, Pops for Champagne**

"Ms. York is a jazz singer of cool composure and artful subtlety, as she demonstrates on her fine new album, "Here With You."

**Nate Chinen, NY Times**

Vocalist Libby York may have gotten a late start in her performing career, but one would never know from listening to these hip sessions. The cool-toned singer chose a number of timeless songs, arranged by Howard Alden, who also plays guitar on most of the tracks, though in more of a supporting role. She savors "But Beautiful" with a heartfelt performance and engages in a playful vocal duet with Warren Vache (who also plays cornet on several selections) of "Walkin' My Baby Back Home." The easygoing bossa nova setting of "Look For the Silver Lining" and the subdued, romantic setting of "Flamingo" showcase her voice at its very best. Russell Malone plays guitar on three tracks, including lush duets with York of the standard "For All We Know" and a warm, swinging take of "A Beautiful Friendship," plus a

loping, bluesy rendition of Wild Bill Davis' "Azure-Te (Paris Blues)." Veteran bassist Jon Burr and percussionist Vanderlei Pereira also provide excellent support to the singer.

**Ken Dryden - [allmusicguide.com](http://allmusicguide.com)**