



# RICK BRAUN

## Sings WITH STRINGS

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From the liner notes by **Don Heckman**, THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MUSIC

**R**ick Braun's been playing trumpet since he was a kid. No news there for the legions of fans his richly melodic playing style has attracted since the release of his first album, *Intimate Secrets* in 1993. Less known is the fact that he's been a singer, and a good one (backing Rod Stewart and Sade among others, with vocals as well as his stellar trumpet) for most of his life, as well.

*Rick Braun Sings With Strings* brings both those skills front and center. And it does so in a way that dips back into the music he's been captivated by since he first picked up a horn.

"This album," says Rick, "feels a lot like coming home. I grew up hearing this music all around the house. Singing it, playing it. Listening to my mom, who was a singer and piano player. She was one of those people who knew every part of a song – the verse, the chorus, the refrain, all the lyrics."

The album will no doubt produce similar comfort feelings for anyone with a love for song. And not just Great American Song. Because what Braun and producer/arranger **Philippe Saisse** have put together in this eminently listenable recording is a gathering of tunes unlimited by boundaries of origin or style.

Some are familiar. Songs such as "I Didn't Know-What Time It Was," "I Thought About You" and "The Things We Did Last Summer" have been memorable themes from the soundtrack of American love life for decades. Rick also especially recalls, "I've Never Been In Love Before" and "Time After Time" as "tunes I've known since I was a kid."

Others are less familiar, but no less memorable. "Once Upon A Summertime" is an English version of Michel Legrand's gorgeous French song, "La Valse des Lilas"; "It's Love" is from the musical *Wonderful Town* by the brilliant songwriting team of Betty Comden, Adolph Green and Leonard Bernstein; and "Say It (Over and Over Again)" was written by Loesser and Jimmy McHugh for a 1940 Jack Benny film titled *Buck Benny Rides Again*.

French song "Plus Je T'embrasse," sung as a duet by Rick and French singer Jasmine Roy, may have unfamiliar lyrics for American listeners, but the melody immediately recalls its origins in the old pop song, "Heart Of My Heart."

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“Lucky To Be Me,” which was given strong consideration as a title for the album, was one of three tunes – along with “It’s Love” and “Plus Je T’embrasse” – that were inspired by hearing a Blossom Dearie album. And Philippe Saisse, in addition to his lush orchestrations, encouraged the inclusion of “The Good Life,” based on Sasha Distel’s French song “La Belle Vie.”

But what links the soaring melodies of all these songs is their embracing lyricism and deep emotional intimacy. Delivered via the jaunty, expressive story telling qualities of Rick’s singing and the warm sound of his flugelhorn (he does not play trumpet on this album), the results are prime examples of the way a gifted jazz artist can find the inner heart of a song.

“I’ve always wanted to play lyrically,” says Rick. “For me, that’s where I live.” And it’s where his singing lives, as well.

Rick’s not the first trumpet player to match instrumental prowess with engaging vocals. He’s preceded by – among others – Louis Armstrong, Bunny Berigan, Dizzy Gillespie, Roy Eldridge, Chet Baker, Clark Terry and Jack Sheldon. Their range extends from Armstrong’s innovative vocal style to Baker’s extraordinary balladry to Terry’s unique scat singing.

“I’m a big fan of Chet’s,” says Rick, “for both his singing and his playing. I’m much more of an inside player, and my inspirations are minimalist players, like Chet and Miles Davis.” Which isn’t surprising, listening to the airy flugelhorn solos that surround Rick’s vocals on every track.

Miles once said that the notes one doesn’t play are as important – maybe even more so – than the notes one does play. And that principal applies as well to singers such as Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett and Sammy Davis, Jr. – whom Rick also lists as inspirations.

Like those high visibility vocal stars, Rick sings with a respect for the vital balance between words and music, for the many-layered connections between the inner story of a song and the beauty of its melody. He does so with the same respect for phrasing that one finds in a Sinatra or a Bennett performance. But what Rick does with that phrasing, with his use of the “minimalist” approach that he cites as an important element in his music, is his own creative craftwork.

And that, as much as anything, is what makes this album so fascinating. At a time when the male jazz vocal field has been far too sparsely populated, ***Rick Braun Sings With Strings*** makes a convincing case for the arrival of a potential new star of the jazz vocal art.



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