

JazzTimes

Robin McKelle - Modern Antique



She's a Berklee grad and a Thelonious Monk Vocal Jazz Competition finalist. **She often sounds a lot like Anita O'Day, except when she sounds eerily like Nancy Wilson. She's blessed with O'Day's indefatigable verve as well as her innate sense of swing, and echoes Wilson's relaxed authority. Two years ago, she delivered a dynamite debut disc, *Introducing Robin McKelle*, embracing a retro big-band vibe with the ease and intelligence of a softer-edged Bette Midler. Now she's back with a second big-band effort even better than the first.**

Willie Murillo, who steered much of the previous album, again serves as principal arranger. But Chris Barron, Gordon Goodwin, Randy Waldman, pianist Alain Mallet and McKelle herself also contribute

arrangements; and remarkably, considering the number of cooks stirring the pot, the results are not only consistently good but also seamlessly consistent.

For fans of gorgeous standards lovingly nestled in ideal settings and sung with impeccable beauty and style, *Modern Antique* is essential listening. But McKelle and company go a few captivating steps further: first by transforming rocker Steve Miller's '80s chart-topper "Abracadabra" into three-and-a-half minutes of pure, inventive jazz pleasure; then by doubling the strength of the Nina Simone anthem "Go to Hell" by defusing its anger and replacing it with assured wisdom; and, finally, by exiting on tiptoe (just McKelle on vocals and piano, supported by a gentle wave of strings) with the tenderly reflective, self-penned ballad "Remember."

-Christopher Loudon