



ALBUM INTERVIEW//

Ian Shaw *Somewhere Towards Love*

Splashpoint Records SPR008CD | ★ ★ ★ ★

Ian Shaw (v, p), Rec. April-July 2009

Following in the footsteps of his great friend Liane Carroll, this solo album of ballads recorded on Splashpoint Records provides a vivid illustration of the qualities that have placed Ian Shaw in the front rank of male jazz vocalists. Stripped of any textural baggage, the 12-track collection beautifully captures the singer's gift for direct expression, the pleasing intimacy of the setting allowing the words and melodies to work their magic.

A number of Shaw's favourite songwriters are represented, including Rickie Lee Jones ('Company'), Noel Coward ('If Love Were All') and Nick Cave ('Into My Arms'), while the first recording of 'Just Having Fun', one of two songs from Simon Wallace and Fran Landesman, offers respite from the predominantly slow-motion tempos. Shaw's self-penned title track, a touching meditation on life's ineluctable highs and lows, is a tour de force that resonates powerfully in the memory. With faint echoes of Bugge Wesseltoft's *It's Snowing On My Piano*, the singer signs off with a purely instrumental take on the venerable 18th-century traditional Welsh air, 'Bugeilio'r Gwenith Gwyn' ('Watching The White Wheat'). Its gently undulating 3/4 rhythm belies a sorrowful tale of star-crossed lovers (in a nutshell, the girl's upwardly mobile mother couldn't bear the thought of having a farm labourer as a son in law). Shaw will be performing songs from the new album at Ronnie Scott's on 17 October, as part of the Ronnie's At 50 series.

Jazzwise talks to Ian Shaw about his album

What prompted your decision to record a ballads album?

They're just such beautiful melodies. It's as far as I'll get to doing my *Love Scenes* album, although they're all very skewed, aren't they? If you look through the entire album the whole family's dead!

And why solo?

There's so much I can do on my own that I cannot get anywhere near, musically speaking, with a band. There are magical moments with piano players, but you can't do three or four bars of unison – in that range there – unless you arrange it.

The title track references 'the child you couldn't father'. Is that a regret?

It is a regret, yeah. The song edges towards every concept of love: your friendships, sex, your partnerships, your affairs, love of life, little tiny moments. A thought that struck me was that's a kind of love I'll never have – to love a child. I also wanted to write a song that was poetic but universal, in that it could be performed by other people. I'd like Streisand to sing it. I don't care who sings it. I do, actually. Belinda Carlisle can leave it well alone, and Ronan Keating mustn't sing it.

Where are all the male jazz singers hiding?

Look at the tradition. The unfortunate smell, the legacy that we're left with, is that all male jazz singers feel the need to be Sinatra. He was great, and some of his copyists were great, but that's not jazz singing is it? It's swinging a Broadway song. I can't do that [sings] 'Let's Take It, Nice And Easy'. I don't know where it's supposed to come from, technically or emotionally. Peter Quinn