

APRIL 2006



Mimi Fox

16000 *Perpetually Hip*

Favored Nations Cool

The first thing you notice about Mimi Fox when she begins the single-note original melody of the title track (the first cut of this double-CD) is her bell-like tone (more highs than the average jazzbeaux, without being shrill or thin) and the second-nature bluesiness of her phrasing. And as she begins expanding and improvising, she lets her chops come to the fore without becoming a candidate for Notes Anonymous.

For her seventh release, and second on Steve Vai's *Favored Nations*, Fox delivers a set of originals and standards in a quartet setting, plus a disc of solo performances culled from the *Great American Songbook*. Whether jamming with pianist Xavier Davis, upright bassist Harvie S., and the great drummer Billy Hart (Miles Davis, Jimmy Smith, Eddie Harris, Pat Martino, etc., etc.) or alone, Fox is in formidable company.

The influence of Joe Pass is apparent most obviously (but not exclusively) on the solo disc, while he, Wes Montgomery, and Grant Green inform the ensemble date. Everyone takes a turn at some point, but she and Davis, in particular, seem to push each other upward and onward, even though they'd never before played together.

After two electric numbers, she handles the ballad "But Beautiful" on acoustic, with a fresh bossa treatment. And although it's on the "band" disc, everyone else lays out on "Night And Day," as Fox spontaneously reinterprets and reinvents the Cole Porter standard (much as Pass might). The solo disc offers more original takes on standards, beginning with Duke Ellington's "Caravan."

On both discs, the moment is given more weight than making sure every note is clinically clean (as in sterile). So creativity isn't interrupted by an occasional sputter or muff (thank God). Which is not to say that the sound suffers; quite the contrary; it feels like you're in the same room with Mimi, with or without the band.

An ambitious effort, to say the least, which Fox rises to (and then some).

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