



Dept. of Good And Evil

Rachel Z

Savoy Jazz 2007

By Ernest Barteldes



Brooklyn-based pianist Rachel Z has won her fame for thinking outside the box when playing jazz, often looking for material outside the genre's realm to make her music. On previous discs, she has transformed the music of Kurt Cobain, U2 and Kate Bush.

On this new release, she includes, among a handful of originals, personal readings of tunes by The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Sting and Bill Withers, alongside material by Wayne Shorter and Joe Henderson with very positive results. Listeners unfamiliar with the rock tunes presented here would never know that the originals featured electric guitars and (in some cases) screaming vocals.

On the original version of "Maps," vocalist Karen O sings the chorus with a certain jaded feel backed by a cacophony of guitars and drums; Rachel Z translates this into the piano, turning the song into a jazz-inflected pop tune. Legendary bassist Tony Levin (King Crimson, Peter Dinklage) and trumpeter Erik Naslund join Z's trio for Sting's "King of Pain," where Naslund freely improvises and Levin plays on his twelve-string Chapman Stick, filling in with odd high octave notes as Maeve Royce plays a more conventional bass line.

One of the key tracks on the disc is "Moon and The Sun," an original penned by Z and drummer Bobbie Rae, that features rare vocals by the pianist, delivered with plenty of feeling.

The closing song is the poignant original, "Saint Of New Orleans." The tune almost has a prog-rock feel at times and this is where the pianist really cuts loose, playing with amazing speed during a few moments and then shifting to a softer mode. **It is one of the greatest moments of a disc that deserves repeated hearings, for every spin brings fresh discoveries to the listener's ears.**