

DEPT. OF GOOD AND EVIL

FEATURING RACHEL Z

Savoy Jazz 17630
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As fearless in her eclectic, ever evolving approach to jazz piano as she is bold in creating sweeping thematic concepts, **Rachel Z** has proven masterful over the course of eight solo releases in bridging both generations and genres. Stylishly blending her bebop and progressive jazz sensibilities with an equal affinity for the most exciting pop and rock artists of the past few decades, she's fashioned groundbreaking tributes to the female artists who have inspired her (*A Room Of One's Own*), saxophone legend and frequent collaborator Wayne Shorter (*On The Milkyway Express*), Joni Mitchell (*Moon At The Window*) and—on her most recent three recordings, which include occasional originals and vocals—fascinating re-workings of songs made famous by The Rolling Stones, Soundgarden, Smashing Pumpkins, U2 and Nine Inch Nails, among others.

Declaring to the world, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that “jazz is not dead, it is alive and right here!,” Rachel's latest fascinating creative stop **Dept. Of Good And Evil** finds her in a slightly Goth state of mind, which complements the mix of popular and more obscure pop/rock covers and lyrical and soulful originals penned by her (“Moon And Sun,” “Walking On Water,” both of which feature her sensuous, romantic vocals) and longtime drummer and collaborator **Bobbie Rae** (the haunting elegy to the “Saint of New Orleans”).

Rachel charts new territory for herself as the leader of the full-fledged ensemble (known collectively as the **Dept. of Good And Evil**), creating powerful jazzy mood swings on the piano over a shifting array of grooves driven by Rae (who also arranged and produced the project), 22 year old bassist **Maeve Royce** (making her recording debut here) and the legendary **Tony Levin** (a longtime Z collaborator who plays electric bass and Chapman Stick guitar parts). **Dept. of Good And Evil** also includes the emotionally resonant trumpet magic of **Erik Naslund**. Rachel discovered the talented, highly adaptable Royce, a native of Annapolis, Maryland, as a student in a theory and performance class the pianist teaches at New School University in New York. “She immediately reminded me of Bill Evan's great bassist Scott LaFaro and I love the way she can groove heavily the way Jimmy Garrison did with Coltrane,” Rachel says.

The recording grew out of **Dept. Of Good And Evil's** extensive, 100-date world tour throughout 2006, a jaunt which took them everywhere from venues in Switzerland to stops in the Midwest, Pearl's in San Francisco, The Jazz Standard in NYC, the Blue Note in Milan and the Rochester Jazz Festival



in New York. Rachel decided to formalize her band with a new name when she realized the level of collaboration that was happening when the ensemble was together.

“The album is really about taking great pop and Goth tunes to another unexpected level,” says Rachel. “I loved the Good and Evil concept, which reflects everything going on these days not only in government but also in the music world, where overhyped projects are often terrible and others which get no hype are great. The Groove Department, Bobby and Maeve, are the good, and I'm the harmonically evil one. The grooves are mostly swinging and upbeat and get people feeling positive. Those are balanced by my dark chords, which are influenced harmonically here by the 20th Century classical vibe mastered by Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock. I balance these with the occasional pretty melody, but even those have darker colors underneath. It's definitely a cool balance.”

Dept. Of Good And Evil draws from a unique mix of pop, alternative and Goth songs from well and lesser-known bands in creating tracks that carry on Rachel's tradition of redefining the songs she loves for a hip, adventurous audience of all ages and generations. Many of the tracks are, like the best jazz and classical movement, multi-movement in nature, with shifting moods and parts that come unexpectedly; Rachel and Rae like to think of the tracks as “suites” that transport the listener to different places over the course of a few minutes.

They follow the high spirited, lively and elegant, completely reharmonized “Soul Meets Body” (from indie pop sensations Death Cab For Cutie) with the coolly swaying, then harder swinging “Under The Milky Way” (a hit in 1988 for the lesser known Aussie band The Church) and a dark, haunting take (with odd time signatures) of The Police's “King Of Pain” that draws out all the heartbreaking intensity of Sting's lyrics in a purely instrumental presentation. Beyond the rock realm—also highlighted here by NY based alt rockers Yeah Yeah Yeahs

(the highly melodic, percussive and optimistic “Maps) and Joy Division (a dramatic, highly improvisational spin on “Love Will Tear Us Apart”)—**Dept. Of Good And Evil** throws in a few surprises from other genres. There’s a big, booming, heavy chorded version of a passage from the French opera “Lakme” and an frenetic, hard grooving jam on sax legend Joe Henderson’s 1964 classic “Inner Urge.”

The Manhattan born and raised Rachel Nicolazzo had music practically ingrained in her genetic code; groomed to follow in her mother’s operatic footsteps, she began voice lessons at two, started classical piano lessons at seven and attended the opera by age nine. “My first dollhouse was a Metropolitan Opera House complete with the stage and dolls which were the performers,” she recalls. “Then I heard ‘Miles Smiles’ when I was fifteen, started rebelling against the classical by improvising, and played with a band which covered Joni Mitchell and Steely Dan songs.”

Listening to Herbie Hancock’s harmonies over Wayne Shorter’s compositions helped her bridge the gap from her classical training to jazz. After launching a quintet called Nardis, she studied with Joanne Brackeen and Richie Beirach and began hanging out at the Vanguard where she saw masters like Dexter Gordon and Bill Evans. Z graduated from New England Conservatory with a “Distinction in Performance” award while working professionally in the Boston area with performers like Bob Moses, Miroslav Vitous, and George Garzone.

Returning home to New York in 1988, she toured with New England Conservatory schoolmate turned rhythm and jazz superstar saxman Najee and later co-wrote the title track for his #1 Billboard album Tokyo Blue. While performing and recording steadily with the classic fusion band Steps Ahead from 1988 through 1996, she also worked with Al Di Meola, Larry Coryell, Special EFX and Angela Bofill, and began a fruitful association with producer/vibraphonist Mike Mainieri, head of NYC Records. Mainieri produced her Columbia Records debut *Trust the Universe* in 1993.

Her connection to saxophone great Wayne Shorter grew from major influence to full blown collaborator over the two years she worked with him on his hit Grammy winning comeback album *High Life*, for which she built a synthesized orchestral framework to crystallize his musical vision. Z also played acoustic piano on the album and was musical director for the tour in its name.

1996 saw the release of her NYC Records debut *A Room of One’s Own*, which she dedicated to the many women artists who have played an influential role in her life. Among the many inspirations Z celebrated were contemporary dancer Judith Jameson, African-American novelist Zora Neal Hurston and Billie Holliday. A throwback to the days when jazz musicians would travel 350 days a year, the constantly gigging Z toured

for this recording with bassist Tracy Wormworth and drummer Cindy Blackman. Her love for art of all kinds has also led Z to embrace the worlds of fashion design, fashion photography, and theatrical performance art.

In a radical departure from that strictly acoustic direction, Rachel took a memorable turn into the electric driven smooth jazz realm in 1998 with her acclaimed hip-hop/ electronica influenced offering for GRP Records, *Love Is The Power*. That same year she also played and programmed synths for Al Di Meola’s album *The Infinite Dream*, and in 1999 she joined Vertu, a fusion supergroup formed by Stanley Clarke and his Return Forever bandmate, drummer Lenny White; she appeared on the band’s 1999 self-titled debut for Epic Records.

Since 2000, Rachel has established with each successive album a foothold in the realm of modern jazz artists discovering fresh new ways to interpret classic standards in their own realm, as well as those by classic pop singer/songwriters and edgy modern rockers. She launched this period with her acclaimed piano trio outing *On The Milkyway Express: A Tribute to the Music of Wayne Shorter*, her debut on Tone Center Records, then followed in 2002 with *Moon At The Window*, her tribute to the songwriting artistry of Joni Mitchell.

While touring around the globe from 2002-2004 with pop/rock legend Peter Gabriel—which included a 2003 South African stint and a gala performance for Nelson Mandela—Rachel recorded and released *First Time Ever I Saw Your Face* (2003) for a Japanese label, *Everlasting* (featuring Tony Levin on bass) for Tone Center (2004) and *Grace* (2005) for Chesky, which featured five original vocal tunes performed by Rachel.

“I just love the process of finding new songs that excite me and working with new musicians that give me that fresh light and inspiration from time to time,” says Rachel. “**Dept of Good and Evil** is the best of everything for me, exciting material to work with, and an incredible ensemble of players which I just love vibing with. We’ll probably expand more into groove-oriented music in the future, but the fun is never knowing what the next great thing is going to be. What I love most about the band is that we can play a whole night of jazz standards and then turn around the next and do a strictly rock and groove thing. It’s going to be exciting to see how it progresses from here.”

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