

## HILARY KOLE

### A SELF-PORTRAIT (Miranda)



Many a jazz career has been derailed due to personal complications, but Hilary Kole's case is rather unique. Five years ago, the sultry

Kole was on the fast track to major success, with two solid standards collections on the Justin Time label. Then, in 2011, Kole split with her boyfriend, Birdland club owner John Valenti, who was also her manager. The breakup grew increasingly thorny (even making the *New York Post*), with Valenti allegedly holding firm to his contract with Kole, disenabling her to record elsewhere.

The dispute now settled, Kole is back in action, having shifted to the smaller Miranda label. Navigating a mixed bag of standards and contemporary pop tunes, the revitalized Kole has undergone a subtle stylistic change. Her sound has grown plusher, closely aligning her with Jane Monheit: Close your eyes and it's almost impossible to tell the difference.

Shaping the majority of the velvety arrangements herself, Kole fronts a quintet anchored by alternating pianists Tedd Firth and John DiMartino, two of the best vocal accompanists around, plus bassist Paul Gill, guitarist John Hart, drummer Aaron Kimmel and cellist Agnes Nagy. Though the overall feel is intimate and cozy, the pliancy of Kole's musicianship shines through, most notably on a towering interpretation of Elvis Costello and Burt Bacharach's "God Give Me Strength," a saucy slither through Paul Simon's "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover" and an effervescent "Lemon Twist."

## CHAMPIAN FULTON

### CHANGE PARTNERS:

#### LIVE AT THE YARDBIRD SUITE (Cellar Live)



Savoring this tight, satisfying hour-long live session, it seems remarkable how briefly vocalist and pianist Champion

Fulton had been acquainted with her accompanying trio. As Canadian saxophonist Cory Weeds explains in the liner notes, in 2013 he invited Fulton for a two-night appearance at his now-defunct Cellar Jazz Club in Vancouver, where she was teamed with local players Jodi Proznick (bass), Julian MacDonough (drums) and Weeds himself on tenor. A



▲ "Back in action": Hilary Kole

year later, Fulton accepted a gig at Edmonton's Yardbird Suite. When costs prohibited traveling with her regular U.S. quartet, she called Weeds and asked if her "Vancouver band" might be available. It was, and the results are sublime.

Fulton opens with a jaunty exhibition of her piano skills, leading a rollicking instrumental version of Frank Wes's "You Made a Good Move" that proves an equally fine showcase for Weeds' dexterity. The rest of the nine-song set focuses primarily on standards, all featuring Fulton's undulating vocals: a furtive "Change Partners"; a darkly caffeinated "Lover, Come Back to Me"; a dreamy "The Boy Next Door"; and a pert "It's a Sin to Tell a Lie." Better still are a loose, shrewd "After You've Gone" and bluesy "Social Call," the young singer (still in her 20s) ably recalling Sarah Vaughan and Dinah Washington. But the absolute charmer is a second mid-set instrumental, the shimmering "Bring Enough Clothes," composed by her father, trumpeter and educator Stephen Fulton, which gives all four players the chance to stretch out.

## ALLAN HARRIS

### BLACK BAR JUKEBOX (Love)



The myriad fans who've fallen under the spell of Gregory Porter need to give Allan Harris a listen. Though Harris has a dozen

previous albums to his credit, including fine tributes to Nat King Cole and Billy Strayhorn, he seems long overdue for Porter-sized accolades.

For *Black Bar Jukebox*, a sly collection of covers and originals, Harris borrows Porter producer Brian Bacchus, who draws forth many of the qualities that have propelled Porter to superstardom: the same laidback assurance and that enticing blend of Sammy Davis Jr. dynamism, Cole sophistication and George Benson jazz smarts.

Eight of the 13 tracks are covers, extending from the plushness of "My Funny Valentine" and show-tune fizz of "A Lot of Livin' to Do" to a masterfully soulful rendition of Bernie Taupin and Elton John's "Take Me to the Pilot" and a moving midtempo treatment of John Mayer's "Daughters" (the sole track featuring

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