



## HILARY KOLE, A Self Portrait



Jonathan Widran



A perennially popular presence on the NYC jazz scene and a world renowned concert hall and symphony performer, Hilary Kole has wowed us before with her dynamic recordings *Haunted Hart* (produced by fellow jazz great John Pizzarelli) and the ambitious concept album *You Are There*, featuring vocal-piano duets with legends like the late Dave Brubeck, Michel Legrand, Cedar Walton, etc. With her intimate, intensely personal and cleverly autobiographical new collection *A Self Portrait*, she shares her truest musical heart that is as tethered to classic 70s pop as it is to pure jazz and which expands beyond the confines of her roots as a Great American Songbook stylist. Fronting her longtime, family like ensemble of Paul Gill (bass), John Hart (guitar) and Aaron Kimmel (drums), along with pianists Tedd Firth and John DiMartino, Hilary shares spirited snapshots of her life – both the triumphs and hard personal challenges.

Creating a powerful set list of songs penned by others, she unleashes deeper emotional elements of her own artistry while offering universal heartfelt truths. Longtime fans of her stellar live performances will love the loose, playful organic approach she and her group take to these 14 songs, a mix of familiar delights and relative obscurities driven by her own arrangements. The tune that perhaps captures her survivor instincts best is an outlier from the older songs that dominate – a deep, soulful reading of the Elvis Costello/Burt Bacharach 90s inspirational piece “God Give Me Strength.” Elsewhere, she focuses on reflections of youth (“While We’re Young,” “When The World Was Young”), memories (“I Remember You”), romance (the cabaret classic “Come A Little Closer,” adapted from Shirley Horn’s version) and lighthearted fun (Bobby Troup’s playful “Lemon Twist”) – balanced by shades of sorrow on the melancholy “Some Other Time,” from Leonard Bernstein’s “On The Town.”

Fans of 70s singer-songwriters will revel in Hilary’s crafty arrangements of “50 Ways To Leave Your Lover” (including wild vocal runs that Paul Simon could never have imagined), Joni Mitchell’s escapist fantasy “River” and a chamber music tinged take on Fleetwood Mac’s “Landslide.” The singer asserts her belief in love via a gender twist on the Beatles’ “And I Love Her” and declares, breaking through the darkness, “You Must Believe in Spring.” By offering an honest, no holds barred glimpse into her musical soul, Hilary Kole has created a true contemporary jazz masterpiece.

- Jonathan Widran