

Debbie Gifford – Changes

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Debbie Gifford has some kudos. This internationally renowned jazz vocalist has been nominated for jazz musician of the year and vocalist of the year in the annual Free Times Music Awards. She has been featured in sell-out gigs to audiences around the world. Her performances include festivals, clubs and concert venues across Europe, Canada, Asia and the U.S. Just some of her gig back catalogue include a performance at the annual Festival International de Musique en Catalogne-Ceret in France, Villa Filippina, Porticello, the Festival of Jazz, Ustica, the Alianto Club Jazz Festival, and JZ Jazz clubs in Shanghai and Hangzhou.

In the U.S., she has played Herb Alpert's Vibrato Jazz Club in Beverly Hills, Calif., Kennedy Theatre and Allen Theatre, and Ohio's Playhouse Square Theatre accompanied by the 17-piece Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. She has also played in Hollywood at a gala celebration of women in jazz and a summer tour of "jazz divas" with the Diva Jazz Orchestra. She has performed with jazz greats including Marcus Belgrave, Bobby Watson, Joe Lovano and Giuseppe Campisi and debuted at the famous Birdland Jazz Club in New York City as the only female vocalist to be invited to perform with Tommy Igoe and the Birdland Big Band.

Debbie Gifford already has an impressive four albums in distribution in the U.S. and Europe including *You Taught My Heart to Sing*, *So Many Songs About Love*, the double-live set *Open Airs* and *One Day at a Time*. The latter includes all-original music written by the songwriting team of Gifford and international jazz pianist John Trzcinski. One of the compositions, "Little Girl Waltz," is part of the soundtrack to a French film by Cat Studios. *Changes* is Debbie's newest and fifth release.

The album opens with George Gershwin's "Fascinating Rhythm" and immediately, any thoughts of this being just another rendition of the song are put aside. It sets off with some decisive percussion from Chris Trzcinski (Dee Dee Bridgewater, Kenny Burrell, Buddy Morrow, many more) before Debbie Gifford leads into the song with the first-verse lyrics spoken, and then the song is delivered in Debbie's own style – and possibly with the fun and enthusiasm Gershwin might have envisaged. It begins with the spoken words, in full rhythm of course, and the song is delivered with just enough tongue in cheek to avoid being taken too seriously.

Debbie's voice is pure and spot on musically. There is a good piano solo and some lovely chorded progressions from the keys of John Trzcinski (Cleveland Orchestra, Milton Berle, Geri Brown and more). This a great mix of a good song, sung well and individually delivered.

"You Take Me Away" begins with a bounce beat and continues in the same vein, with Debbie telling the listeners about her travels before suddenly finding love in a night. The story is well told and the clarity of the words make it easy to follow. What Debbie Gifford has the knack of doing is adding little emotive snippets into her songs which make them different and unlike other deliveries.

"A Night in Tunisia" is beautifully delivered, and the intonation of piano and voice is gorgeous. Debbie aims for and hits those deeper notes, with a touch of the Nina Hagen in the held ones, the vibrato edging just this side of over-load – which is the cleverness of the singing as Gifford knows exactly what she is doing. This is an outstanding song and delivery. A definite Eastern air here, but not over the top. Engaging and lovely. "Spinning Wheel" is short but very sweet. Set up by Chris Trzcinski's drums, Debbie picks up the rhythm and sings with a sleazier side to her voice, showing more versatility and her range here is really impressive. A bassy section changes the tempo whilst Debbie's vocals slide in over the top with a brassy backdrop supporting.

"Senza" is well arranged and sang in lovely, sensual tones. It is a very well-worked, version of this song from "Flight of the Phoenix." John Trzcinski's piano solo is beautiful – simple as that – and the song lilts smoothly throughout. "Heartbreak" is introduced by broken chords, and that's appropriate enough for this song, but what is even more appropriate are the words and delivery from Debbie. This is a song which pulls at the heart strings, even more so given this delivery. At times, Gifford sounds like a rock diva, other times like a sensual night club singer, and all times like a great jazz singer – which she is.

"Orange Coloured Sky" is different, not so much of an epic but a narrative, expertly told using voice and vocal intonation to get the message across about surprise and chance encounters when least expected. "Moon River" is sung with a breathy, swooping style which I was not sure about until the second or third listen – then I got it: The song flows, like a river! Of course. There is a waltzy feel to this and that adds a different feel to the essential song, which is familiar, but the way this is revealed is not familiar or banal at all. Chris Trzcinski's drums on this track hold it together and John Trzcinski's piano solo is wonderful. The swing to this is excellent, all the while holding true to the essence of the original. Clever and dextrous. The plays with the rhythms work well to make this a slightly quirky but very effective number.

"Into Your Eyes" has something of a Latin rhythm to it and is clearly sung, with a touch of the big brass sound provided by the band. You can almost see a guy in a big-colored shirt with puffy sleeves and maracas coming your way – a fun number and lightly delivered. "La Voce Del Silenzio" is a lovely song, composed by Paolo Limiti, Bogol and Elio Isola and

made famous by Andrea Bocelli. Debbie Gifford delivers the song with emotion, passion and perfect diction. She puts her own mark on it and the transposition into the higher register for her alto voice works really well. It has been done before by Dionne Warwick, who recorded a version as “Silent Voices,” but Debbie’s take is lovely – and her delivery in Italian allows the emotion to come across well. “La Voce Del Silenzio” is a fine finish to a great album.

Throughout *Changes*, there is a sense of self-realization, and the interpretation of each song is delivered with a twist which is Debbie Gifford’s own. The choice of the songs is good because it allows the listener to gain a sense of the depth and breadth of Gifford’s ability. Her emotive interpretations stirs the soul, and there is also a sense of fun which pervades many of the numbers. The results are endlessly engaging, as *Changes* gives a sense of the artists having fun, whilst also recording some impressive arrangements and deliveries of familiar and not so familiar numbers.