

JULIET KELLY

REVIEWS

BBC Music Magazine



JULIET KELLY

Spellbound Stories

Juliet Kelly (vocals), Nick Ramm (piano/keyboards), Oli Hayhurst (bass) etc
Purple Stiletto PSR004 59 mins
BBC Music Direct £15.99

'Brit jazz' has a long tradition of successfully working with literary forms, whether as a source of song lyrics or by way of inspiration. This genre-within-a-genre is too rarely identified, let alone celebrated, so new examples are always welcome. This one comes from singer/songwriter Juliet Kelly and it's her first new album for several years. This is a set of original songs inspired by novels, and it's either a cunning ruse or a nuisance that the listener is obliged to visit her website to discover which and by whom, but expect George Eliot, Alice Walker and numerous points in between.

The nuanced warmth of Kelly's rich, full voice is streets ahead of most of her contemporaries and hearing her wrap it around the many styles presented here, which range from drum-driven primitivism to knowingly intimate balladeering, is a delight. Her band is discreet and subtle, the recorded sound lucid and spacious. *Roger Thomas*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Sunday Times Magazine

THE SUNDAY TIMES

21st June 2015

JULIET KELLY

Spellbound Stories *Purple Stiletto Records PSR004*

Don't be put off by the fey sleeve design: Kelly's interweaving of literature and melody really is worth exploring. A restless singer, she had the bold idea of writing a sequence of pieces inspired by some of her favourite novels, from *White Teeth* to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. It could have ended in disaster, but Kelly has found a way of marrying a jazz sensibility with R&B-inspired arrangements for acoustic trio that are never clichéd. To top it off, she strips Kate Bush's *Wuthering Heights* to its bare bones. Haunting.

Clive Davis

Bebop Spoken Here Blog

Friday, June 05, 2015

CD Review: Juliet Kelly - Spellbound Stories



Juliet Kelly (vocals); Nick Ramm (piano/keyboards); Oli Hayhurst (bass); Eddie Hick (drums); Manjeet Singh Rasiya (tabla on track 9)

(Review by Ann Alex)

This CD, Ms Kelly's fourth, is made up of original songs based on novels. I approached it with some trepidation as I believe that genre mixing doesn't always work, but I needn't have worried as Ms Kelly has come up with a truly enjoyable and interesting (in the best sense) work. She certainly knows how to

write effective lyrics, memorable, meaningful, with lots of good 'hooks'.

All the tracks are her own songs except for Kate Bush's *Wuthering Heights*, which is a wonderfully simple arrangement sung with keyboard accompaniment. Songs are based on novels such as Alice Walker's *'The Color Purple'* (*Forbidden Fruit*); C S Lewis's *'The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe'* (*Magic and Mystery*); and Toni Morrison's *'Beloved'* (*Ghosts*). The novels chosen all contain elements of magic and the supernatural. Ms Kelly's voice is a pleasing alto and the arrangements are quirky, lilting and rhythmical by turns, played by skilful musicians, with good use of keyboard tones, and double tracking of the voice and choral effects on some tracks.

I especially liked *Little Things* with its Latin rhythm and light 'clicky' drums, and *Ghosts*, sung to an ooh sound, with bass and piano solos. In fact I'd venture to say that any of these tracks could become jazz standards if they were played often enough. You can hear these songs if you go to the launch at the Pizza Express Jazz Club in London on June 18, but you needn't go so far away, as the band are appearing at the Queen's Hall in Hexham on September 19.

Spellbound Stories is released on June 22 on Purple Stiletto Records.

Full details of the novels are on www.julietkelly.com

Ann Alex.

JULIET KELLY

REVIEWS

Jazzwise Magazine

The Guardian

jazzwise

Juliet Kelly

Spellbound Stories

Purple Stiletto Records ★★★★★

Juliet Kelly (v), Nick Ramm (p), Oli Hayhurst (b) and Eddie Hick (d).
Rec. date not stated

Whether it's the dramatic percussion flourishes of the folk-like album opener 'One More Dance' or the shifting time feels and intricate vocal layerings of 'Little Things', this fourth album from vocalist Juliet Kelly completely seduces the senses. All but one of the songs are based on favourite books, from

the music box feel of the Narnia-inspired 'Magic & Mystery' to *The Colour Purple*-inspired 'Forbidden Fruit'. Propelled forwards by Oli Hayhurst's deeply grooving 7/4 ostinato, with pianist Nick Ramm contributing a fine solo, 'Devilish Disguise', like 'Sympathy for the Devil', is inspired by Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. Over a sustained bass pedal, Kelly's wordless vocalise in 'Ghosts' (mixed by Seb Rochford) is a standout, while 'All He'll Ever Need' illustrates the singer's facility for penning the catchiest of vocal hooks. Subtle changes of texture include the plangent timbre of the accordion in the sorrowing waltz 'No One Can Tell'. If Kelly has transformed pop material before – 'Your Love Is King' on her 2003 debut *Aphrodite's Child* (2003) plus covers of Soul II Soul ('Back to Life'), Soft Cell ('Tainted Love') and The Eurythmics ('Here Comes The Rain Again') on her 2009 album *Licorice Kiss* – nothing quite prepares you for the wonderfully strange take on 'Wuthering Heights', the album's sole cover.

Peter Quinn

Juliet Kelly: Spellbound Stories review - charming set inspired by jazz singer's favourite books

★★★★★

(Purple Stiletto)



© A well kept secret ... Juliet Kelly

British vocalist Juliet Kelly's latest album is dedicated to her favourite books, featuring songs inspired by Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple*, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and a cover of Kate Bush's *Wuthering Heights*. Polar Bear drummer/producer Seb Rochford imaginatively mixes the wordless, *Beloved*-inspired track *Ghosts* - an evocation of a lost spirit that features Kelly drifting through a dark landscape visited only by Nick Ramm's empathic piano undertow, Oli Hayhurst's bass and Gilad Atzmon drummer Eddie Hicks's brushwork. Ramm's synths quietly weave behind Kelly's unfussy account of *Wuthering Heights*, while producer Dilip Harris brings edginess to the pulsing *Devilish Disguise*, and a spooky urgency into *All He'll Ever Need*, which is inspired by *The Time Traveller's Wife*. *Forbidden Fruit*, the Walker dedication, finds Kelly at her most improvisationally open over Ramm's pumping Hammond organ. Kelly has been a well-kept secret of the UK scene for some time, but the honesty and charm of *Spellbound Stories* might change that.

JULIET KELLY

REVIEWS

Marlbank Blog

Juliet Kelly, *Spellbound Stories*, Purple Stiletto Records ***1/2



It's been a while since we've heard from singer-songwriter Juliet Kelly, an artist who first burst through on the London scene more than a decade ago and has acquired a burgeoning reputation since through national touring.

This album, mostly her own music and lyrics plus a cover of Kate Bush's "Wuthering Heights" and like that song *Spellbound Stories* takes its inspiration in literary sources, novels such as *White Teeth* and *The Color Purple*, that have fed the singer's vivid imagination.

A studio album recorded in London with Kelly's band featuring keyboardist Nick Ramm, who makes a wide range of interesting sounds behind the singer, plus Oli Hayhurst on bass, the former Orient House Ensemble player Eddie Hick on drums, and a tabla-player guest in Manjeet Singh Rasiya on "Magic and Mystery."

Quite middle of the road in places yet hard to dislike, Kelly has an attractively warm voice blessed with great diction and the ability to shape a phrase, the songs that caught my ear are the jaunty "Little Things" ("The little things about you/The little things that make me love you") and "Beautiful Smile" with its clubby stylophone-like metallic sound intro from Ramm the lyric of which has quite a lot of clarity and directness (*I'm in love with your smile, beautiful smile*) that invades you after a few listens. I also liked the Dawn Penn-like swagger of "Forbidden Fruit" and Ramm's acid-jazz organ flavoured run flowing into the engaging heart of the song. Some of the others I must confess passed me by or just didn't stick around in my head long enough to bed in but there's enough here to return to with pleasure and Kelly is well worth hearing live. And she's launching the album on 18 June at the [Pizza Express Jazz Club](#) in London. SG

JULIET KELLY

REVIEWS

Jazzviews Blog



JULIET KELLY - *Spellbound Stories*

Purple Stiletto Records (PSR004)

Juliet Kelly (vcls) Nick Ramm (pno/keys) Oli Hayhurst (bs) Eddie Hick (drs)

A fourth recording and the first in nearly six years from the wonderfully striking Ms Kelly. Her rich voice, that she only discovered when she was studying economics at university, is ideally suited to the material here.

Juliet's influences are diverse and on this occasion, when on holiday in Greece she was moved to compose themes inspired by her favourite novels. From vocal tributes to Paulo Coelho's *Veronika Decides To Die* through the *Time Traveller's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger and on to the final track celebrating *The Colour Purple* from Alice Walker the

lyric writing is superb. Ten pieces in all plus a fresh look at the huge 1978 hit by Kate Bush, *Wuthering Heights*.

The album does require some work from the listener and benefits when a brief knowledge of each storyline has been absorbed. The lyrics are beautifully composed and the trio members well chosen. Nick Ramm's solo, s are spikey and probing while Olly Hayhurst is rock steady on bass. Freelance drummer Eddie Hick who has worked with such diverse musicians as rock superstar Mark Ronson, saxophonist Dave Liebman plus Gilad Atsmon's *Orient House Ensemble* gives a master class in the technique of playing in support of a vocalist.

For me there are three standout tracks, the atmospheric opener *One More Dance* where the highly descriptive vocal combines well with great bass drum work and a probing piano solo, the beautiful wordless vocal on *Ghosts* along with the up tempo *Forbidden Fruit* which was featured on the BBC's *Jazz Line Up* programme recently.

Add this album to your collection for the superb song writing, distinctive vocals and accomplished musicianship from this all British band.

You can catch Juliet next at The Stables Wavendon on 15th September, following her upcoming four gig tour in Italy.

Reviewed by Jim Burlong

JULIET KELLY

REVIEWS

London Jazz News Blog

Juliet Kelly - Spellbound Stories

(Purple Stiletto PSR004. CD review by Peter Jones)

The idea behind this self-produced fourth album from singer *Juliet Kelly* is a good one: each song is about one of her favourite novels. Since the song titles don't give much away, part of the fun is trying to work out which song is about which book (although if you want to cheat, you can find out by going to her website). The books are from a wide range of authors, but all of them are loosely linked by themes of mystery, magic and the supernatural.

The backing is supplied by a sympathetic and imaginative piano trio, and although the tone is often appropriately spooky, there is a light summery feel to tunes like *Beautiful Smile*, whilst the bouncy *Little Things* has already proved sufficiently pop-tastic to attract the ears of the people who compile radio playlists: it was played repeatedly between sets to a huge audience at last weekend's Love Supreme Festival.

Elsewhere the mood is darker: the opener *One More Dance*, a song that seems to be about death and madness, is powered by *Eddie Hick*'s hypnotic drum pattern; *Devil in Disguise* has a strong melody in 7:4 that one could imagine *Sade* covering, with a lengthy coda featuring pianist *Nick Ramm* with Kelly's improvised vocals given added atmosphere by a heavy dose of reverb. Deep bowed bass from the ubiquitous *Oli Hayhurst* underpins the slow, sinister opening to *Ghosts*, before *Ramm*'s piano arrives to relieve the tension.

Kelly is able to command a range of styles, from the austere Berlin cabaret feel of *No One Can Tell* to the twinkling *Magic and Mystery*. Her songs are beautifully written, with excellent commercially viable melodies. If there is one questionable choice, it is the version of *Wuthering Heights* included here: Kate Bush's original track is such a towering presence that attempting a reworking of it is, frankly, asking for trouble.