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Featured Artist: Lauren Wood

CD Title: Love, Death & Customer Service

Year: 2006

Record Label: Bad Art Records

Style: Smooth Jazz

Review:



Lauren Wood is one of those people for whom I would stand on the sidelines and cheer until I was hoarse because she is just so likeable. Therefore when you hear this writer rave about her new CD *Love, Death & Customer Service* understand there may be just a slight bit of bias involved.

Thirteen wide-sweeping, exquisitely orchestrated tracks adorn this disc. The singer/songwriter who first became a household name many years ago when she penned the hit song "Fallen" from the movie *Pretty Woman* is a perfectionist when it comes to creating a new album. She spent the better part of a year mastering *Love, Death & Customer Service* and it shows up in the quality of the music.

On January 2, the second track "Contradictions" was released to smooth jazz and Adult Contemporary radio stations. As always, Wood is at the top of her game with beautiful phrases and sophisticated arrangements. Wood whose vocals are normally an alto provides an elegant reading in the lower stratum of a soprano.

The instrumental first track serves as a prequel to "Contradictions". Wood explains, "Billy Payne (synthesizer strings) started "Contradictions" with his instrumental interpretation (of the song.) It suggests (to the listener) 'lay back, take your shoes off and don't be in a hurry.' This is a laid back pretty album."

Love, Death & Customer Service has a delicate, sensitive thread running throughout the CD. One song that brings raw emotion to the surface is "I Don't Believe In Love". The heartbreak of disappointment and betrayal is accentuated by Novi's viola. As the singer pleads looking for answers, "What did I do wrong?" the acoustic bass of Larry Tuttle and Larry Treadwell (also on electric guitar) gently weep.

As you listen to "I Don't Believe In Love," you feel searing pain and heartache. You may find yourself drifting back to a similar moment in your own life. Unlike the brash bitter 'burn him at the stake' message, that comes through much of today's popular music Wood's charts and phrases envelope us in tears more than anger.

For those of you who are old enough to recall the Zombies' "Time Of The

SPOTLIGHT



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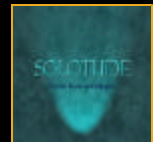
(m.a. productions)



RICK FRANK

Brookline, Summer
(Decker Creek

Records)



EYRAN

KATSENELENOGEN

Solitude

(Eyrán Records)



**DANIELE
CAVALLANTI
ELECTRIC UNIT
WITH NELS CLINE**

Smoke Inside

(Long Song Records)



**BRADLEY
LEIGHTON**

East Coast Project

Season" you are in for a real treat. Wood's alto vocals are well matched for this deeply grooved classic hit. The singer/songwriter created some new arrangements that put Billy Payne's organ vibes front and center. His blues colored chops are spectacular. Kudos to Wood and Arno Lucas for their hand played percussion beats. Performing a cover of a classic hit can be a dangerous outing for an artist but Wood has once again hit gold!

Lauren Wood's brilliance as a producer shines through on this disc as she surrounds herself with musicians who are friends whom she deeply trusts. While she provides some direction as to what is expected for the most part Wood believes in what she refers to as the "gifts" that the musicians bring to a piece of music. We end up with an album that comes off sounding much closer to a live performance than most studio-produced records. Hints of improvisation sneak into her music such as Ann Patterson's sax solo on "Contradictions".


Even though *Love, Death & Customer Service* sometimes explores darker subjects it is for the most part an uplifting, delicate and elegant storybook of life. Songs such as the love tryst "You're Mine" and the quirky fun "Come And Live With Me" make this CD a must have for any serious music fan. Vicki Randle's vocals combine with Wood to provide a soulful blues rendering of "Come Live With Me" and that description is merely to satisfy the genre driven minds out there. The song also contains elements of bluegrass and pop.

Other great tunes to listen for include "Til You Let Your Heart Win" and "Walk Toward The Light". Wood has invested her personal experiences in both songs. The background vocals of Vicki Randle, Arno Lucas, Leslie Smith and Tata Vega form a splendid choir on "Walk Toward The Light".

There are many good things to talk about when discussing the CD. It is therefore difficult to pick out a single highlight. Lauren Wood has provided us with a treasure chest of beautiful phrases, magnificent charts and a complete cast of musicians that excel at playing them. Sit back, put up your feet, close your eyes and enjoy.

Artist's Website: <http://www.laurenwood.com>

Reviewed by: Joe Montague

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(Pacific Coast Jazz)

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