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Jane Monheit Biography

Jazz vocalist Jane Monheit celebrates the tenth anniversary of her remarkable recording career with her most mature, heartfelt album yet, *Home*, a collection of standards that represents a passionate return to her roots as a jazz musician. The CD features the band she has worked with onstage and off for most of her career, as well as special guests such as John Pizzarelli, Mark O'Connor, and Larry Goldings. This is her first album for Emarcy/Universal and also marks her debut as sole producer of a recording.

"I didn't feel the need for anyone to help me realize the vision of this record", says Monheit. "This is a project I've been thinking of for a long time...an album of songs and a group of musicians that are deeply important to me. There was no need to discuss what should or should not be included, or who should play...this is clearly me, from the heart. My relationships to these songs and my love for the people playing them make this album what it is."

On the whole, *Home* is arguably the loveliest and lightest album of Monheit's 10-CD discography. Treasured songs include the upbeat Arthur Schwartz/Howard Dietz classic "A Shine On Your Shoes", the swinging Rodgers and Hart gem "Everything I've Got Belongs To You", a charming rendition of Irving Berlin's "Isn't It A Lovely Day", and Jerome Kern/B.G. Desylva's accentuate-the-positive "Look For The Silver Lining". "I'm so much more drawn to the happier songs," she says with a laugh, noting that this is the first album she's made in its entirety since becoming a mother. (Her son was born halfway through the recording of her previous album, *The Lovers, The Dreamers, And Me*). "Having a beautiful child in my life has really lightened me up, especially where music is concerned! I'll always have a high level of drama, though...it makes me who I am, and certainly helps me be better at what I do!"

An extraordinarily gifted jazz vocalist whose sincere and romantic interpretations of exceptional songs has made her a favorite in both the jazz and cabaret worlds, Monheit has garnered numerous accolades in the past decade. Her first album, *Never Never Land*, was voted top debut recording by the Jazz Journalist's Association and stayed on the Billboard Jazz chart for over a year. Subsequent albums either charted high, or in several cases, debuted at number one, and yielded two Grammy nominations in the Best Instrumental Arrangement Accompanying Vocals category, recognizing the work of Vince Mendoza on 2002's *In The Sun* and 2004's *Taking A Chance On Love*.

The making of *Home* has been a defining moment in Monheit's career for different reasons. She has emerged as a fully complete musician, sole producer of the album, and able to deliver vocals that show a deep maturity, reflecting her life experience as a woman and mother. However, Monheit experienced a first during the making of the record: She had to come to grips with the reality that her voice is not an infallible instrument. "Every musician goes through some sort of crisis in their playing," she says. "You take your talent for granted, when the fact is that you're not invincible. I've been singing since I could talk. It was effortless. But for the first time in my life, I've had to learn how to take care of my instrument and be more gentle to myself to appreciate it fully. Your voice is very delicate, and can need rehabilitation due to constant overuse and travel...especially with a toddler! You get exhausted...I needed to slow down and take care of myself."

The entire experience, both deeply rewarding as a producer and incredibly challenging as a vocalist, helped to render a final product that is more true to who Monheit really is than perhaps any of her past projects. "All of my records are important to me in different ways. I've been very lucky...I've had the chance to make these epic fantasies in the studio with gigantic, lush arrangements, incredible orchestras, and all the magic you could ever ask for. It was time for me to do what's real, though. This album more closely resembles what we do on stage than any other. The musicians I work with every day, Michael Kanan, Neal Miner, and Rick Montalbano, are my family. They are the heart of this record, and I guess my vocals provide the soul."

Home opens with the bright, swinging "A Shine On Your Shoes", which Monheit first heard as a child in one of her favorite films, 1953's *The Bandwagon*. Guitarist Frank Vignola, a constant collaborator and friend of the band, contributes. Following this is Monheit's charming take on Rodgers and Hart's "There's A Small Hotel", which also features close family friend Joe Magnarelli on trumpet. "My husband and I have played live with Joe so many times in the past, and I'm thrilled to finally have recorded with him," says Monheit. "Actually, this tune seemed right because it reminds us of our honeymoon...and will probably remind others of theirs."

The slow and sweet "This Is Always" (Mack Gordon/Harry Warren) was recorded by Monheit once before (and later discarded) for her third album, *In The Sun*. "When I recorded the song the first time, something just didn't click, and I'm so glad I waited until the time was right. People tell me often that they've danced to my recordings at their weddings...and that completely inspired our interpretation of this tune. It's such a lovely thing to know we've helped people create beautiful memories!"

While there are many versions of the Billy Rose/Lee David song "Tonight You Belong To Me", Monheit's favorite is the version sung by Bernadette Peters and Steve Martin from the hit movie *The Jerk*. Here Monheit settles in with John Pizzarelli for a cozy duet, accompanied only by John's guitar. "When I decided to record this, I knew it had to be with John," she says. "We did it in about a minute, too!" Other than a version of "They Can't Take That Away From Me" for the PBS series *Legends Of Jazz*, this is the first time they've recorded together.

Next up is “Look For The Silver Lining”, one of Montalbano’s all-time favorite songs. “My husband’s influence on the direction of this album was immense,” Monheit says. “I cannot put into words how much he and the band contributed to the production.” This is followed by a delicate and moving rendition of the Alec Wilder/William Engvick ballad “I’ll Be Around”, which with Kanan’s arrangement, says Monheit, is “pure musical theater.” Violinist O’Connor, who enlisted Monheit to record on a past project, returns the favor on two tracks: the swinging, humorous “Everything I’ve Got Belongs To You”, and the Duke Ellington romance “I Didn’t Know About You”, seamlessly linked to his “All Too Soon”. As for O’Connor’s contribution, Monheit says, “Mark is a genius- the loveliest, sweetest player. Plus, I grew up listening to his music....my father plays banjo, so there was a lot of bluegrass and folk music in the house. I am honored every time I sing with Mark.”

Other highlights include a soulful take on Arlen and Harburg’s “The Eagle And Me”, the warm-hearted Kanan/Monheit duet on “Isn’t It A Lovely Day” (Michael and I feature duets in every show and on every album,” she says) and sweeping waltz “While We’re Young”, another nod to musical theater that serves as the CD endsong (which Monheit says is “a beautiful album closer and a perfect show opener”).

The only non-standard on *Home* is one of the album’s most moving pieces, “It’s Only Smoke”, composed by Larry Goldings and Cliff Goldmacher. On the tune, Goldings plays piano and Monheit is joined by vocalist Peter Eldridge, with whom she studied during her years at Manhattan School of Music. “I’ve known Peter since I was fourteen, and we’ve loved singing together for so long...this was the perfect tune for us to record together. This is the first time I’ve played with Larry, although I’ve been a huge fan for many years. His songs move me so much, and this one affected me particularly deeply. It floated in my head for days, to a point where I was living the song...it was that intense, especially because singing with Peter is so special to me.”

On *Home* Monheit has upped the ante in her career by digging deep into what brought her to this music in the first place: great songs, and her passion for interpreting them. This return to the heart of who she is, and the fearless honesty with which she imparts her musical truth, lend great maturity and sincerity to the album: her closeness to these songs and the musicians who play them are what *Home* is all about.