The Incomparable Blossom Dearie Essay, Research Paper

Hearing Blossom Dearie sing is a surreal experience. She is a vocalist who has a uniqueness,

charm, and range unlike any other. A natural cabaret singer best suited to comedic songs and other”light”repertoire, Blossom can just as quickly turn around and draw you into the most aching, beautiful love song possible. She is the girl you fall in love with because her lyrics leave you with the impression that she too is in love, and you can not help but smile. A singer, pianist and songwriter, with a ‘wispy, little-girlish’ voice, Dearie is regarded as one of the great supper club singers (Line)

Her father was of Scottish and Irish descent; her mother emigrated from Oslo, Norway. Countless rumors surround the origin of Blossom?s name, but the story that has outlived all others has been that she gained the name ?Blossom? when her brothers arrived home to greet their new baby sister with a basket full of peach blossoms. The name Dearie, according to Blossom, is a fairly common Scottish name ? a topic on which she has done an extensive amount of research. (29 Richardson)

She began taking piano lessons when she was five, and studied classical music until she was in her teens, when she played in her high school dance band and began to listen to jazz. Some of Blossom?s early influences included Art Tatum, Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Martha Tilton, who sang with the Benny Goodman Band. Dearie graduated from high school in the mid-40s and moved to New York City from her hometown of East Durham, nestled in the Catskill Mountains of Upstate New York, to pursue a music career. She joined the Blue Flames, a vocal group within the Woody Herman Big Band, and then sang with the Blue Reys, a similar formation in the Alvino Rey Band.

In 1952, while working at the Chantilly Club in Greenwich Village, Dearie met Nicole Barclay who, with her husband, owned Barclay Records. At her [Nicole?s] suggestion, she went to Paris and formed a vocal group, the Blue Stars. The group consisted of four male singers/instrumentalists, and four female singers; there, Blossom sang with Annie Ross, gaining critical acclaim for their performances in the Mars Club, the Club de Paris along the Paris nightclub circuit.

While in Paris, Dearie met impresario and record producer Norman Granz, who signed her to Verve Records. She eventually made six solo albums, including the highly regarded My Gentleman Friend with this label. Unable to take the Blue Stars to the USA because of passport problems (they later evolved into the Swingle Singers), she returned to New York in 1956 and resumed her solo career, singing to her own piano accompaniment at New York nightclubs such as the Versailles, the Blue Angel and the Village Vanguard. She also appeared on US television shows hosted by Jack Paar, Merv Griffin and Johnny Carson.

In 1966 she made the first of what were to become annual appearances at Ronnie Scott ’s Club in London, receiving excellent reviews as ?a singer’s singer, whose most important asset was her power to bring a personal interpretation to a song, while showing the utmost respect for a composer’s intentions?. (qtd. 33) In the 60s she also made albums for Capitol Records, including May I Come In?, a set of standards arranged and conducted by Jack Marshall.

In the early 70s, disillusioned by the major record companies’ lack of interest in her kind of music, she started her own company, Daffodil Records in 1974. Her first album for the label, Blossom Dearie Sings, was followed by a two-record set entitled My New Celebrity Is You, which contained eight of her own compositions. The album’s title song was especially written for her by Johnny Mercer, and is said to be the last piece he wrote before his death in 1976. During the 70s, Dearie performed at Carnegie Hall with former Count Basie blues singer Joe Williams and jazz vocalist Anita O’Day in a show called The Jazz Singers. In 1981 Blossom appeared with Dave Frishberg for three weeks at Michael’s Pub in Manhattan. Frishberg, besides being a songwriter, also sang and played the piano, and Dearie frequently performed his songs, such as ?Peel Me A Grape?, ?I’m Hip? and ?My Attorney Bernie?. Her own compositions include ?I Like You, You’re Nice?, ?I’m Shadowing You? and ?Hey John?. From 1983, she performed regularly for six months a year at the Ballroom, a nightclub in Manhattan, and in 1985 was the first recipient of the Mabel Mercer Foundation Award, which is presented annually to an outstanding supper-club performer.

In her live performances, Blossom creates an intimate and particular atmosphere, particular in that she requests that her audience does not drink or smoke during her performances. But whether or not one attends a live show of Blossom?s, her albums some how are able to evoke a sense that the listener is experiencing a sound all his or her own ? as if she is sharing something very new and unabashedly personal with the listener. The compilation CD, Jazz Masters 51, contains songs from all six albums put out on the Verve label. The album begins with a be-bop tune, ?Deed I do?, a song that pays homage to an unending love and the reasons that we stick around for that special someone. Blossom?s voice is short lived in this particular track as she gracefully bows to the sounds of the guitar and bass to convey her gratitude and love for the man she has found.

The next track, ?Loverman? offers a sharp contrast in that the mood shifts from the sublime to melancholy. In ?Loverman?, the listener gains the sense that love is a thing that is longed for but never quite attained. It is more of rumors; for the unlucky, love never seems to pan out the way everyone describes it.

?Everything I?ve Got? celebrates the features that couples bring to relationships that are seemingly anti-parallel to one another. We nevertheless accept those faults as gifts since by the very fact that a person is offering these things ? at the same time, willing to accept our gifts as well ? denotes them as things worth celebrating. In one particular track, ?More than you know?, Blossom steers away from the vocals and delights us with her superb piano skills. Here, Blossom is at her most intimate in that she conveys those things that cannot be verbalized, using only her keys to communicate the subtle nuances if her message which is left entirely to the listener to decipher.

Further into the album we are introduced to Blossom?s ability to transcend the language barrier when she interprets three songs in French. Here the listener does not necessarily need to be fluent it the French language to understand, and know fully well her theme ? love. Her ability to inflect certain notes at just the appropriate chords and the way that certain lyrics are sung are enough for anyone, in any language, to glean a clear grasp of her message.

The final three tracks, previously unreleased prior to the distribution of this album, maintain the same appeal as do all of Blossom?s tracks. ?They say its spring? is a reflective piece. Blossom compares the love of her youth to that of an adult and ultimately, the listener is left with the impression that neither matter so long as we are privileged enough to have loved. ?Blossom?s Blues?, my personal favorite, is a flirty, self-revealing track of Blossom as a person and not as an icon. She playfully flaunts herself as the envy of any and every man; Blossom discusses ? she does not complain ? the burden of being the person she is. These things leave her with absolutely no regrets for she revels in the fact that her features offer all the things that ?a good man needs.?

While Blossom has not attained the fame of an Ella or a Sarah, Blossom has enjoyed a fair and lucrative share of popularity amongst a mostly esoteric following here in New York City. Audiences can still enjoy Blossoms clever lyrics sung by her sweet, girl-next-door voice in popular jazz clubs such as the Blue Note in the West Village.