



KURT ELLING

Dedicated To You

Kurt Elling Sings the Music of Coltrane and Hartman

Released on Concord Jazz

Catalogue Number 7231314

31st July 2009



Vocalist **Kurt Elling** has never hesitated to take on a musical challenge. He has, in fact, revelled in the opportunity to hone his skills while exploring new creative territories. Since his 1995 debut, the innately hip Chicagoan has forged a potent body of work marked by quality and an audacious sense of risk taking. He has applied his remarkable creativity to one intriguing, often demanding, project after another. But none has been more daunting than his new Concord recording, **Dedicated to You: Kurt Elling Sings the Music of Coltrane and Hartman**.

It all began in his home town of Chicago. The jazz festival there suggested that Elling reiterate one of the greatest jazz vocal albums ever made - the John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman album they made together in 1963 - for a bill they were planning. "I'm always happy to have an idea like that" recalls Elling, "but it didn't interest me quite as much to simply reiterate the material. So I asked if I could do it my own way."

The project morphed through various phases, yet one aspect was consistent - Elling's desire to place the music in the setting of a string quartet, first with acoustic bass, and later with a complete jazz trio led by his long-time musical companion, pianist **Laurence Hobgood**, who also provided most of the arrangements. Elling also recruited the great **Ernie Watts** on saxophone and the string quartet **ETHEL**.

In November 2008, the London Jazz Festival hosted Kurt Elling's sensational tribute in what was undoubtedly one of that years highlights (for his London date, Ernie Watts was replaced by Bennie Maupin). Two months later, it was performed and recorded at New York's Lincoln Centre, packing the best of the live performance into twelve tracks bursting with a stunning spectrum of music, both vocal and instrumental.

Dedicated to You: Kurt Elling Sings the Music of Coltrane and Hartman opens with an interpretation of the American Songbook classic, *All or Nothing At All*, in which the interconnectedness between Elling's vocal and Watt's tenor saxophone calls up immediate references to the Coltrane/Hartman source. It is the second track however, that sets the stage for the balance of the recording. It begins with a laid-back, floating exposition of the standard tune, *It's Easy To Remember*, creating an atmospheric setting for Elling's description of the original Coltrane/Hartman recording. "A poetic jazz memory," says Elling who tells more about the seemingly random recording session that produced one of jazz history's most memorable collections of songs. It's a compelling story, and Elling describes it with the articulateness of the poet he is.

Recording his transformative interpretations in a live concert afforded Elling a spontaneous setting, and that sense of vivid aliveness courses through every track all of which are, plain and simple, definitive examples of how to remain true to the inner essence of a song.

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