

JAZZ AVIARY Review by Jonathan Widran

Finally! A jazz singer who wouldn't get offended by a critique that began "Boy, this one's really for the birds!" Alfred Hitchcock may have tapped into our fear of these soaring creatures years ago, but Susan Krebs has nothing but fondness for our feathered friends—and expresses her joyous affection magnificently throughout this fascinating concept project. The impetus for these expertly arranged 16 tracks of every great bird tune one could imagine ("Skylark," "Blackbird," "Songbird," "Strange Meadowlark") was the notion that we have a deeply rooted connection to the avian tribe and the universal music we share with it. Conceived and performed by Krebs—a singer/actress who launched her musical career with 1999's well-received **Jazz Gardener**—in collaboration with the Soaring Sextet of some of L.A.'s most notable musicians, **Jazz Aviary** is the culmination of several years of concert and multi-media presentations. One of the sonic hooks is, of course, actual field recordings of birds, but this is no new age nature CD. Even if you don't connect spiritually on the concept, cool, easy swinging arrangements of tunes like Abbey Lincoln's "Bird Alone" and heartfelt, soulful expressions of lesser-heard bird songs like "Baltimore Oriole" are irresistible offerings from a formidable jazz artist. The most fascinating arrangement is the pure upright bass, birds, sax and percussion driven "Bob White," which Krebs delivers with wit and a wink. This is followed by a creative, bird and flute sweetened caress of "Blackbird." She also includes a unique medley of "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," "Dink's Blues" and Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds," showing that birds can go country and reggae (with a marching New Orleans vibe) and assure us that "every little thing's gonna be all right!" A lot of great jazz interpreters gather great songs together, but few do it as well and convincingly as Krebs. This is a treat for lovers of birds, jazz and music that makes the heart soar like "A Gaggle of Geese."