

STACEY KENT

Summer Me, Winter Me



photo credit: Judy Maxwell

Whenever Stacey Kent would perform certain songs in concert, the acclaimed jazz singer would field questions afterward from fans wanting to know where to find recordings of them. Now Kent has an answer: on *Summer Me, Winter Me*, a new album that Kent recorded with saxophonist, arranger, producer and husband Jim Tomlinson.

“Jim and I had never intended to make a request album, but fans, especially the ones who follow us a lot, were asking for the songs on this record,” says Kent, who got her start singing in London cafes in the early 1990s, before releasing her first album, *Close Your Eyes*, in 1997. “They ended up more or less creating the theme for this album.”

Summer Me, Winter Me includes “Happy Talk” from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s 1949 musical *South Pacific*, Jacques Brel’s 1959 song “Ne me quitte pas” and its English-language counterpart “If You Go Away,” and a take on “Under Paris Skies” descended from the version that Andy Williams recorded in 1960. There are also original songs, including a new version of “Postcard Lovers,” which Tomlinson co-wrote with Nobel Prize-winning novelist Kazuo Ishiguro, a frequent collaborator. The earlier version of the song appeared on Kent’s 2011 live album *Dreamer in Concert*.

Together, the blend of original songs and standards on *Summer Me, Winter Me* comprises an album

that’s not quite like anything else Kent has made — and unmistakably her own.

“These were all songs that just didn’t have a home,” she says. “And then they all got together and made their own home. It feels cohesive to me. I am very proud of this.”

Kent has performed around the world, earning a legion of dedicated fans and a host of honors and awards as she has amassed platinum, double-gold and gold-selling albums, with album sales in excess of two million and more than half a billion digital streams.

IS THIS YOUR POST-PANDEMIC, BACK-TO-NORMAL ALBUM?

It is, and it isn’t, because we conceived of this album, and we even started to record it, in 2019, before lockdown. We could have put it out at that point, but when lockdown happened, we had the idea for a different project, *Songs from Other Places*, which was the album before this one. That really was a lockdown album because it was songs that touched upon how we were feeling at the time, in an oblique way.

HOW DID IT FEEL TO RETURN SUMMER ME, WINTER ME TO THE FRONT BURNER?

It’s been really fun to go back to it after having left it for so long, because it felt incredibly fresh and exciting. Like returning to old friends, repertoire-wise and band-wise. It was like we hadn’t seen somebody for a long time. It was a real reunion-type

It just didn’t fit yet. Jim wrote it, and we recorded it live, and then we left it. We often leave songs, even some that we love. There are some songs that I’m desperate to share, and so other things take a backseat. “Postcard Lovers” didn’t stick around long, and then one day we were home and we started to play around with it. I said

to Jim, ““Postcard Lovers’ feels like it’s in three-four.” And it was a lightbulb moment. Jim went down into his studio and came back with this new version, and it was so good. We started to play it live, and people were continually asking for it.

JIM: When you’ve got something that already has the ink dry on it, it takes a lot more effort to dislodge what’s already there from your mind. It really was a question of stripping it down, taking it back to the nuts and bolts again, and deciding what

I wanted to keep and what I wanted to get rid of. One of the things that unlocked it for me is that it’s quite an unusual form, in contrast to the standards that we do. You know, at the start of the song, the plane takes off, and at the end of the song, in some way, it has to land again. I felt like it had landed too soon in the original version, so I reworked the back end of the song so it stayed airborne longer.



album artwork

feeling. In that way, it’s similar to coming out again after the pandemic, because you’re seeing your old friends and you’re seeing your old haunts and you’re getting back to normal.

SUMMER ME, WINTER ME DOES FEATURE ONE SONG YOU’VE RECORDED BEFORE, BUT IN A DIFFERENT ARRANGEMENT. WHY DID YOU REVISIT “POSTCARD LOVERS?”

THE ALBUM ALSO FEATURES DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SAME SONG: “IF YOU GO AWAY” AND “NE ME QUITTE PAS.”

This is a song that we play live a lot, in different configurations, but we never recorded it. Often at signings after a show, there’s a lot of conversation between me and the fans, and also the fans with each other, about which version is their favorite. It’s the same song, but it’s a different song — they definitely have their own emotional content. We thought, if this is going to be that kind of request album, we’ve got to record it, and we should record it in both versions. We kept them quite different. One has the string quartet on it and Jim’s beautiful clarinet, and the other one starts with me a cappella, as if I’m alone, I’m talking to my lover, but I’m also talking to myself. It’s so reflective.

JIM: Performing in different languages gives you a privileged insight into how each language has its own sort of vernacular of metaphors. The idea that when you sing in French you could translate directly into English, it just wouldn’t work. Not because the words wouldn’t be understood, but because the metaphor for those emotions is different in a different language. It would sound clumsy or inauthentic.



photo credit: Curtis Schwartz

IS THERE A BALANCE YOU STRIVE FOR BETWEEN ORIGINAL SONGS AND STANDARDS?

Not in terms of proportion, really, it’s just that they are both really important to us. So we’re always going to have that

blend, and sometimes it’s more of one than the other live, or on a recording. But I wouldn’t want to live in a world where I only sang the originals. And I certainly wouldn’t want to live in a world where I only sang the standards.

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