



Andy Bey
American Songs

SAVOY 17330
★★★★½

There was a time when the prized commodity for jazz vocalists was maturity, an important crossroads where experience and talent meant also an intersection of respect and regard. Nowadays such distinctions are trivialities and afterthoughts, a result of the more disposable elements of pop marketing. In that sense, vocalist and elder statesman Andy Bey finds himself adrift in the precocious rabble of the crowd. Yet, with *American Songs*, Bey again shows that he doesn't just deserve to be elevated—he's also long overdue for being celebrated.

Bey's approach to these 10 prime picks from the book of American jazz standards illustrates the sort of thoughtful approach lost on fans of fad jazz, where the singer looms larger than the song. Bey's take on the poetry of Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life" does more than just evoke images of Johnny Hartman's unforgettable pairing with John Coltrane; it moves it one subtle step forward with the addition of his own unique harmonic contributions from the piano bench and interpretive twists at the microphone.

Elsewhere, Bey is unafraid to tackle certain tracks and dress them in his own inimitable way. Cuts like the frenetically energized "Caravan" and smoothly rendered "Satin Doll" feature Bey's rich baritone as they warmly embrace the material, from boisterous belt to bluesy breathlessness. While the art of crooning is alive and well in the heart and mind of today's youth movement in jazz singers, imitating the rich flavor of Bey's style is a tough proposition. Unfortunately, the real shame is that it's also an even tougher sell. —John Kreibergs

American Songs: Never Let Me Go; Prelude To A Kiss; Speak Low; Angel Eyes; Midnight Sun; Caravan; Lush Life; Satin Doll; It's Only A Paper Moon; Lonely Town. (60:50)

Personnel: Andy Bey, vocal, piano; Frank Wess, saxophone; Dwight Andrews, reeds; Vernell Garnett, trumpet; Steve Davis, trombone; Geri Allen, piano (3,6); Paul Meyers, guitar; Kiyoshi Kitagawa, bass; Mark McLean, drums; Mino Cinelu, percussion.

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