

2) ELLI FORDYCE with JIM MALLOY SOMETHING STILL COOL ELLI FORDYCE, nono # When Sunny Gets Blue / Dindi / Hey There / One Note Samba / Don't Blame Me / Wouldn't It Be Lovely? / Almost Like Being In Love / Imagination / Love Is Here To Stay / They Can't Take That Away From Me / It Could Happen To You / I Thought About You / Something Cool. 48:30. Fordyce, vcl, arr; Malloy vcl; Harry Whitaker, III, p, arr; David Epstein, p; Mark Wade, b; Joe Strasser, d; Samuel Torres, perc; Joe Magnarelli, flgh. 1999, 2002, 2006, NYC, NY.

I'm old enough to remember a day when to hear "Something Cool," you had to dig out June Christy's LP of the same name. And for a good number of years that remained true, as I guess there was some sort of tacit understanding in the vocalist community that the song pretty much belonged to her. Not so any more. Recordings of "Cool" abound: Cheryl Bentyne, Dardanelle, Julie London, Stephanie Nakasian, Tierney Sutton, Felicia Sanders, Julie Kelly, Eileen Farrell and—even—Judy Garland are just a few of the singers whose recorded versions are out there.

So, on (1), Yorkshire born Gill Cook [scroll down to (2) for Elli's review.] uses it as the title tune for her second CD, and she sings it much the way June did, in a voice to match—pleading her case without hysterics or self pity, just sitting at the bar and kinda staring into her drink, musing about the road that's brought her to wherever she thinks she is. It's one of the best tracks on the CD, with only the rhythm trio in support of the vocal. For the rest, this singer shows a firm grasp of phrasing and her scat ("Joy Spring") is most convincing. She swings the opening "Fashioned," as well as "Daydream" and "Lights" with ample dexterity. Steve Waterman's smeary open horn is a bonus on the latter, but Cook's tendency to occasional affectation creeps in with her insistence on singing, "daydreaming just like-A-me." On "Comes Love," she prefaces "nothing can be done," with an annoying string of na-na-na-na-na's, and during "Not There," a dreadful song whose popularity must be laid at the rigor-mortised feet of a certain group of "Zombies," she insists on some "woo-hoo-hoo"-ing. That track is all but rescued by Steve Waterman's energetic quadruple (?) tonguing and squawkish trumpet effusions, plus some blowsy tenor from Tim Whitehead. And, in fact, the band is one of the CD's great assets. The rhythm trio is solid and the horns always well placed and pungent, but one has to wonder why the producers thought that "Skies," a solid track with strong open horn work from Waterman, had to end on such an imperious note of reverb. Also on the deficit side is the singer's overcooking of "Muddy" in much the way a Las Vegas belter might. Then, she fails to snatch "Happy" out from under the feet of the Captain & (Toni) Tennille where it would have been wise to let it remain. That ditty, and "Not There" are the sort of items you might see in an IQ test series, where you're asked to identify the items that don't fit in a run. Still, these noted missteps aside, this is a vocal CD which weighs heavily at the Jazz end of the Jazz/cabaret vocal spectrum, and is most welcome for so being.

But, on (2), Elli Fordyce makes "Cool" very much her own. With only support from David Epstein's piano, she acts out the tune's inherent Blanche-DuBois-ness ("bet you couldn't imagine I had fifteen different beaus who would beg and beg to take me to the ball"), and with just the slightest touch of parlando fashions an absolutely exquisite reading of the Billy Barnes lyric. Epstein alone backs her on "Imagination," and—again—it's a ravishingly speech inflected performance. Harry Whitaker takes over piano duties on the remaining 11 tracks, assisted by various configurations of the musicians listed in the header. His work throughout marks him as an accompanist every bit as responsive and resourceful as Epstein. Mark Wade on bass and Joe

Strasser on drums are models of pliantly restrained support. Jim Malloy joins Elli vocally on five tracks (“Hey/One Note/Almost/Stay/Thought”) and fits into the album’s air of relaxed melodicism perfectly. Fordyce’s soprano isn’t particularly forceful, but rests easily on a lyric with a reticence that tends to heighten the sense of intimacy informing her interpretation of literate lyrics. She swings and scats on “Happen,” with tasty flugelhorn comments from Joe Magnarelli who’s also heard on “Dindi” on which Ms. Fordyce gives that serially recorded tune such an expressively coherent ballad reading, with Bossa implications, that it takes on the aspect of an entirely new song. It’s just one of the extraordinary tracks on this lovely CD. And I hasten to add that this album has forced me to temporarily set aside the misgivings I usually have when I read that the “basic tracks” were recorded in one location and the vocal tracks somewhere else, at a later date. Somehow in this case, it does not matter: the result is honest, seamless, authentically human music. And did I mention that the notes say this singer is 70 years old? (Her photo on the cover shows her at a much younger age.) I’m not asking where she’s been all my life: I just hope she keeps recording for the rest of my life—and, perhaps, even beyond that.