

Countryopolitan Duets

By Duncan Warwick
Country Music People

Anna Wilson and her husband, Monty Powell (who also produced) are Nashville-based songwriters. She has had cuts on albums by Chris Cagle, Billy Ray Cyrus, Lee Ann Womack and Reba McEntire, and she has released a few albums herself, including her debut on Curb in 2003, which despite including songs by notable Nashville tunesmiths Gary Burr and Matt Rollings hinted at the jazzy style of Wilson. These days, outside of writing, she is, for all intents and purposes a jazz singer of some note (apparently jazz crooning is where her heart lies) and *Countryopolitan Duets* rather neatly combines the two styles.

All the songs bar one—the Wilson/Powell and Jeff Franzel penned *I will Never Know* which features Lloyd Green—are what one might call “standards”, and Wilson is joined by a variety of country greats from Ray Price and Connie Smith to Lady Antebellum and Rascal Flatts as well as some giants from the world of jazz like guitar whiz Larry Carlton and young crooner Matt Dusk.

Former American Idol contestant Matt Giraud makes an appearance on the lush and laid-back Cindy Walker evergreen *You Don't Know Me*, a song of which I will never tire, though this doesn't trump my favorite version by Leon Rausch. Most interesting to me was to find my all time favourite singer on the same track as one of my least favourite country acts of recent years. Yes, in one of the

most unlikely team-ups ever, Ray Price and Rascal Flatts join Wilson on *You're the Best Thing That Ever Happened To Me*. Ray Price has previously nailed the song some years ago, and has long had a penchant for jazzy easy listening, and here it's not far from his previous version. Well into his 80s, it's amazing how well he can still deliver a song, and thankfully, Rascal Flatts are consigned to backing vocals. Their harmonious “oohs” and “aahs” are rather good and remind me of Manhattan Transfer.

For that matter, Lady Antebellum sounded even more like Man Tran on the Patsy Cline classic, *Walkin' After Midnight*. This track was notable as the first Lady A record I'd ever really want to hear again. With a terrific swinging big-band arrangement and the name of the biggest group in Country Music on it, this track should see a lot of Radio 2 action.

Keith Urban joins Anna Wilson on the much recorded *Good Time Charlie's Got The Blues* and for me, it's his finest work since being with The Ranch. While I was pleased to see Billy Dean's name on the list of guests, here, he and Wilson cover the Bob Wills classic *Cherokee Maiden* but with horns where there ought to be fiddles. It worked less well for me and could not even get close to Asleep At The Wheel's *Ride with Bob* version, or for that matter several others. *Welcome To My World* is particularly well suited to the late night arrangement here and Canadian Matt Dusk has more than a hint of Michael Buble about his delivery, and

Willie Nelson's *Night Life* was always a jazz tune anyway, and somewhat controversial in its day as the title track of a Ray Price album.

Performing Kristofferson's *For The Good Times* in this style is hardly new. Sinatra made a great job of it, and still my favourite version of one of the all-time great songs is Perry Como's hit version. Here it is the unmistakable Kenny Rogers doing his thing with Wilson, and it couldn't be anything else. It is exactly how you imagine it as being.

My favourite track was *Just For What I Am*. The Dallas Frazier/A.L. Owens penned song was a hit for Connie Smith back in the early 70s and despite the Song For Swingin' Lovers type arrangement, which I loved, there is no mistaking this is a country song.

This is an album of huge cross-over potential. Anna Wilson's vocals are spot-on and entirely suited to the style, the arrangements are terrific, and if you've ever enjoyed a Dinah Shore record you should love this. I did. Besides, it'll give you something to play when entertaining non-country fans at a dinner party.