



SARA LEIB

Biography

Nearly all of the dozen songs on **Sara Leib**'s remarkable ***Secret Love***—from Rodgers and Hammerstein's "It Might As Well Be Spring" to Bob Dylan's "Make You Feel My Love"—qualify as standards, yet the Los Angeles jazz singer does quite un-standard, wonderfully refreshing things with every number she wraps her glowing, frequently cheery mezzo-soprano tones around. While transforming the tunes with amazing new twists of time and tempo, Leib uncannily cuts to the emotional cores of the composers' original lyrics.

Leib "reinterprets the template of the standard into something that seasoned jazz enthusiasts and crossover fans from the Norah Jones camp will both be blown away by," Jamie Rattner wrote in *Performer* magazine of the singer's acclaimed self-released debut CD, 2003's ***It's Not the Moon***.

She takes her unique way with American popular songs steps further on the highly anticipated ***Secret Love*** on Origin Records. Produced by **Matt Pierson**, whose extensive credits include work with Brad Mehldau, Jane Monheit, and Joshua Redman, the album was recorded in New York City with some of the most consistently creative and in-demand young instrumentalists in the world of jazz: alternating pianists **Taylor Eigsti** and **Aaron Parks**, bassist **Harish Raghavan**, and drummer **Eric Harland**. **Dayna Stephens** blows tenor saxophone on four selections, and **Richie Barshay** adds hand percussion, including tablas, to five.

Leib's friend Eigsti was the catalyst for bringing Pierson and the others to the project. "I gave them a wish list of my dream band and they made good," she says of the pianist and the producer. "It was important to me to pick a rhythm section that was happy playing together and that had worked together before and were really comfortable with one another. I was really lucky that they all said yes."

Many of the songs on ***Secret Love*** are rendered in uncommon time signatures. "**It Might As Well Be Spring**" is performed in 11/4 or, as Leib explains it, "a measure of six and then a measure of five." Leib ends the tune most cleverly with a quote from Fran Landesman and Tommy Wolf's "Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most." Cole Porter's "**Night and Day**," she says, switches from 6/4 to 5/4 every eight bars. Porter's "**Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye**" can be counted in three or in six. "**So This Is Love**" was written by Al Hoffman was a waltz for the Disney classic *Cinderella*, but Leib and company take it as a samba.

“The song is about absolute happiness,” the singer says of “So This Is Love.” “It’s very much about the beginning of love when everything the partner does is so amazing and wonderful. It didn’t sound completely happy to me as a waltz.”

“**The Thrill Is Gone**,” by Lew Brown and Ray Henderson, is performed in 4/4 with an Afro 12/8 feel. Leib’s treatment was inspired by her friend Kate McGarry.

“It’s such a sad song, and I hadn’t understood it to be quite as sad until I heard Kate’s arrangement of it,” Leib says. “I thought, ‘Sad. I can do sad!’ I wanted the pain to come in waves, as things generally do when one realizes, ‘Oh, I’m in a relationship that’s not gonna work.’”

Both Morey Churchill’s “**Someday My Prince Will Come**” from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and Sammy Fain and Paul Francis Webster’s “**Secret Love**” alternate between 7/4 and 4/4 time signatures. Ben Harper’s “**With My Own Two Hands**,” Dylan’s oft-covered “**Make You Feel My Love**,” the Jonathan Richards–Sara Leib original “**The Way You Behold**,” Ann Ronell’s “**Willow Weep for Me**,” and the Everly Brothers’ classic “**All I Have to Do Is Dream**,” penned by Lucy Simon and Boudleaux Bryant, are served up in 4/4.

Leib wrote lyrics to the ballad “The Way You Behold” after her friend, bassist Jonathan Richards, had composed it as an instrumental, much as she had Gerry Mulligan’s “Night Lights,” which she retitled “It’s Not the Moon,” for her previous CD. And she’s known “All I Have to Do Is Dream” since infancy, when her mother used to sing it to her.

All of the arrangements on ***Secret Love*** were written by Leib, save for the title track, which was arranged by two friends from her days at the New England Conservatory: pianist **Jed Wilson** and vocalist **Heather Masse**, now a member of the Wailin’ Jennys. As for the title track, Leib explains that the reason she loves the arrangement is because “it’s quite thoughtful. And instead of reharmonizing it, it’s rather deharmonized, which makes it sound more pop-y.

Of her own arrangements, Leib says, “I never really set out to go, like, ‘I’m gonna make this more complex,’ but in order to learn jazz, we all have to do a great deal of imitations of what other people do—listening to Ella, listening to Sarah Vaughan, listening to Carmen McRae, listening to Blossom Dearie—and the way they phrase things and arrange things. I started to think that if I’m gonna do a song, I should do it in a way that’s a little bit original, ’cause otherwise what’s the point? I might as well just sit at home and put on an Ella record.

“I don’t think the idea necessarily is to make something more complex,” she continues, “like putting something in an odd time signature just for the sake of putting something in an odd time signature, but coming up with some sort of theme or some way that I think might reflect the meaning of the lyrics in a different way, either more true, less true, more sarcastic, reinterpreted. That’s the main idea behind some of the arrangements.”

Sara Leib was born on December 21, 1981, in Los Angeles and raised there by her furniture designer father and social worker mother. Her older brother played trumpet, which inspired her years later to mimic the instrument’s tone during wordless choruses in live performance and on her first CD, although she doesn’t do it on ***Secret Love***.

During her high school junior and senior years at Hamilton Music Academy in Los Angeles, she sang in the jazz choir and listened to vocal versions of Miles Davis and John Coltrane songs recorded by the New York Voices. She began to memorize solos by those and other jazz instrumentalists before learning to transcribe them onto paper.

“I didn’t start writing them until I went to music school,” says Leib, who holds a B.M. in Jazz Performance with a Concentration in Music in Education from the New England Conservatory and an M.M. in Jazz from the University of Southern California (USC). “My ears had to get better and faster. Now I love transcribing. It’s like a dorky, fun thing to do. I make all my students do it.”

Leib was invited during her senior year to join the Grammy High School Jazz Choir. Her rendition of the Quincy Jones–Siedah Garrett tune “We B. Dooinit” on a CD by the student group helped her land a scholarship to the Berklee College of Music. After two years at Berklee, she transferred to the New England Conservatory, where her instructors included saxophonists **Jerry Bergonzi** and **Steve Lacy** and vocalist **Dominique Eade**.

“She was the first person with whom things started to click and make sense,” Leib says of Eade. “She was also a wonderful role model in that she has amazing technique. She’s a great writer, and a wonderful improviser. Her ears are as wide as the ocean. She not only has the ability to do something well but also to teach you how to do it.”

Leib, who taught technique, improvisation, and private voice lessons at USC while working on her master’s degree, has performed and taught throughout the world, including Japan, South Africa, Guatemala, New Zealand, Nepal, China, and Greece. One of her most memorable experiences was performing with pianist **Art Lande** at Dazzle Jazz Club in Denver.

She recalls **Paul McCandless**, the saxophonist on the Denver date, telling her, “Sometimes playing with Art is like riding a bucking horse. You did very well. You didn’t fall off.”

Currently, at the Los Angeles Music Academy College of Music in Pasadena, Leib gives private voice lessons and teaches classes in improvisation, singing for instrumentalists, and chart writing. She also has a teaching studio in her Los Angeles home and offers free online advice through her website singingtv.com. In addition, she curates the music at The Tar Pit, a Los Angeles bar and restaurant where she sometimes sings herself.

Leib’s credentials are an indication that she knows the art of jazz singing inside and out, but the proof is in her performances. The dozen on ***Secret Love*** stand out as being among the most original and satisfying to have been captured on disc in recent memory. •

Sara Leib: *Secret Love*

(Origin Records)

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Press Quotes

“Colorful and excitingly refreshing.” – Zach Behrens, The LAist.com

“reinterprets the template of the standard into something that seasoned jazz enthusiasts and crossover fans from the Norah Jones camp will both be blown away by.”

- Jamie Rattner, *Northeast Performer Magazine*

“She’s got a beautiful, natural voice...she improvises with aplomb, scatting with ease.”

- Steve Greenlee, *The Boston Globe*

“Leib shows great promise and talent...Sara scats particularly well in an instrumental style that belies her tender age...”

- Lou Lanza, *All About Jazz*

“Sara Leib offers a fresh approach to jazz vocal classicism.” -Larry Katz, *Boston Herald*

“Leib displays an attractive voice and inventive phrasing. Sara Leib has great potential for the future and It’s Not the Moon is an important first step.” - Scott Yanow, *L.A. Jazz Scene*

“...a real bundle of dynamite” - Gary Van Dyk, *Cape Times, Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA*

“[Sara Leib] can scat so well...I was indeed surprised.” - Julio Martinez, *KPFK Arts in Review*

“...worth seeking out. Leib has a terrific voice, her improvising is inspired, and the Boston-based trio that backs her is top notch.” - *Boston Globe*

“The new voice of jazz.” - David Lepe, *Siglo 21, Guatemala*

“One of the more sweet voices of current music” – Mario Cordero, *La Hora, Guatemala*

"Sara Leib is a young, evolving talent and with the future of jazz in her hands...the tomorrows of jazz will be secure." - Bob Agnew, *The LA Jazz Scene*

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