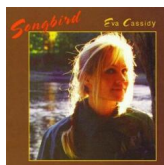


Eva Cassidy – Songbird (1998)

Written by bluesever

Wednesday, 28 October 2009 10:51 - Last Updated Wednesday, 20 January 2021 20:25

Eva Cassidy – Songbird (1998)



1. *Fields Of Gold*
2. *Wade In The Water*
3. *Autumn Leaves*
4. *Wayfaring Stranger*
5. *Songbird*
6. *Time Is A Healer*
7. *I Know You By Heart*
8. *People Get Ready*
9. *Oh Had I A Golden Thread*
10. *Over The Rainbow*

Though many recording artists meld and straddle a variety of genres, few if any defy categorization by excelling in so many disparate styles as the late Eva Cassidy. The diverse offerings from the evocative thrush from Washington, D.C. -- who died tragically of melanoma in 1996 at age 33 -- run the gamut from the radio-friendly pop cover of Sting's "Fields of Gold" to a jazz chanteuse rendition of the standard "Autumn Leaves" to the soulful R&B of Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready" to her spine-tingling gospel delivery of "Oh, Had I a Golden Thread." Cassidy's mastery of each is perhaps best evidenced by the fact that the Washington Area Music Association honored her (in 1996) as Best Female Vocalist in four separate categories: blues, contemporary jazz, traditional jazz, and roots rock/traditional R&B, in addition to naming her Artist of the Year, and her then-current release, *Live At Blues Alley*, Album of the Year. *Songbird* is a posthumous anthology culled from that album and her other solo release, *Eva By Heart*, along with one track from her 1992 duet album with Chuck Brown titled *The Other Side*. Though the production value on several songs falls well short of state of the art, the shimmering beauty of her crystal-clear voice, combined with her seemingly limitless range and imaginative phrasing, cuts through to both heart and soul. Whether she beckons a soothing timbre for seductively restrained passages or shakes the rafters by unleashing her formidable power and gorgeous falsetto, Cassidy's warblings always fuse her purity of tone with a purity of

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emotion and a palpable connection with the lyric. Though the songs described above are luscious, the coup de maître is the album's finale -- surely one of the great recordings in popular music of the time -- Cassidy's stunning version of "Over the Rainbow." Recorded with only her own accompaniment on acoustic guitar, keyboards, and synthesizer, Cassidy's voice swoops and soars over a musical panorama -- though with a wistful, melancholic shading that almost seems to betray a premonition of her own demise, despite the fact that it would be nearly four years before she would be diagnosed with her terminal illness. Cassidy more than rearranges the Judy Garland classic -- she reinvents it. The song is immediately familiar, yet the beautiful colors that arc the sky are very much hers. In an eerie coincidence, if one inverts the two words contained in the album's title, Songbird (which was taken from her straightforward rendition of the Fleetwood Mac cut), the result is "Bird Song." The irony is that "Bird Song" is the title of the Grateful Dead's ode to another phenomenal woman singer whose melodious flight was tragically cut short: Janis Joplin. One could argue that its lyrics and sentiment are equally apropos of Eva Cassidy. ---Scott Taylor, allmusic.com

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