

Bria Skonberg - Nothing Never Happens (2019)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Blackout* (5:25) 2. *So Is The Day* (6:11) 3. *Blackbird Fantasy* (4:37) 4. *Square One* (4:08)
5. *Villain Vanguard* (4:40) 6. *Bang Bang* (4:40) 7. *What Now* (4:37) 8. *I Want To Break Free*
(7:07) Bria Skonberg - trumpet, vocals Mathis Picard - piano Devin Starks - bass Darrian
Douglas - drums Doug Wamble - guitar Jon Cowherd - Hammond B3 Patrick Bartley -
saxophone (3, 5, 8)

In what can only be considered a wide, darker turn from her five previous recordings which swayed and swung in more traditional, pre-bop, jazz settings, award-winning trumpeter-vocalist-composer Bria Skonberg takes us through the dark night of her heart and the national soul on the fraught, yet impossible-not-to-listen-to *Nothing Never Happens*.

Swamped as we all are by the twenty-four-hour news cycle which brings the apocalypse to our very doorsteps, and the myriad emotions that all too often empower us or paralyze us, Skonberg urges—grittily, soulfully, with a shadowy, mid-career-Lucinda-Williams swagger and growling horn—to "get off the grid" in the insistent opening track, "Blackout." Pulled and pulsed by bassist Devin Starks and drummer Darrian Douglas, the track opens into light and plunges again into the shadows, with Skonberg's warm, edgy vocal leading the way. Now on the verge of utter frustration, Skonberg revisits the lighter tinged "So Is The Day," the title track from her 2012 release on Random Act Records, with a slow-burning, shattering vocal vengeance which rips your heart out while pianist Mathis Picard and guests Jon Cowherd on Hammond B3 and Doug Wamble on guitar clear the field with a rock and roll force for the lady to take one last plunging solo.

The utterly unique and unexpected "Blackbird Fantasy" crash melds Duke Ellington and his long time trumpeter Bubber Miley (whose influence is heard all over Skonberg's own distinctive instrumental voicing) 1927 composition "Black and Tan Fantasy" with Paul McCartney's

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perennial "Blackbird" for a performance which would be a highlight on any other recording, if not for the two tracks that preceded it. Just as Duke brought his many players to the fore, Skonberg does the same, taking the tune into bandstand territory with Picard, Cowherd and Douglas swinging away while she solos à la Miley. The wishful and ruminative "Square One" breaks the tension with dreamy guitar, and a lyric which includes "Day is over/Work is done/Hear the echoed praises sung/Still hanging on that bottom rung/Here I am at square one."

But wait, there is more. Fully aware she has your attention and is in full control, the jazz-rocking instrumental "Villain Vanguard" features alto saxophonist Patrick Bartley Jr blowing in breakneck tandem with Skonberg. In her current frame of mind, "Bang Bang"—originally a breezy, Sonny Bono-written solo hit single for Cher in 1966—becomes a tangle of male/female relationships and the dire violence which all too often results in bloodshed and politicians offering thoughts and prayers. The concluding track, Queen's playful "I Want to Break Free" from 1984, (known far and wide for its then genre/gender-smashing cross-dressing music video) offers up a full gleam of hope as the band power grooves throughout the track's exuberant seven minutes. Skonberg has been on track to break through in a big way for over a decade now and Nothing Never Happens is deservedly her moment. ---Mike Jurkovic, allaboutjazz.com

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