

Mindi Abair - Life Less Ordinary (2006)

Written by bluesever

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01. Do You Miss Me?

02. Long Ride Home

03. It Must Be Love

04. The Joint

05. Rain

06. True Blue

07. Slinky

08. Ordinary Love

09. Bloom

10. Far Away

Mindi Abair (vocals, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, keyboards) Michael Landau (guitar) Matthew Hager (guitars, keyboards, bass instrument, percussion, drum programming) Keb' Mo' (dobro) Ricky Petersen (piano, organ) Stevo Theard (keyboards, drum programming) Larry Klein, Stan Sargeant (bass instrument) John "J.R." Robinson (drums) Paulinho Da Costa (percussion) Lalah Hathaway (background vocals)

Saxophonist Mindi Abair's smashing good looks may have a part in her success and exposure, but there's no denying the craft of her first two CDs and their picture-perfect smooth-jazz singles. With her sales numbers growing, you might have expected this CD to further the arc of her hit-making blueprint. But now she's gone all Sanborn on us, emulating one of her sax heroes. With *Life Less Ordinary* it's clear that Abair won't be satisfied popping out repetitive grooves each year. That doesn't mean that the CD doesn't have its share of hits. Two instrumental tracks stand out as among the catchiest she's recorded: "Bloom" and "Long Ride Home."

Abair and musical partner Matthew Hager clearly want to capture the energy of a live show. Abair's playing, mostly on the alto, is looser and blusier. Her funky alto solo during the intro to

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“Do You Miss Me” signals her new sound, as does the pounding bass line. The bluesy feel is recaptured on the smoky-bar vibe of “The Joint,” where Abair’s sax floats and screeches over a repeated blues-guitar riff straight from the ’70s.

She switches gears on the percussive, crunch-and-funk hip-hop grooves of “Slinky,” fusing funk, chill music and pop to maximum effect, and dips into country-rock territory with Rickie Lee Jones’ “It Must Be Love.” While Abair channels Jones’ voice, Lalah Hathaway soothes on background vocals and Keb’ Mo’ lays down a brief Dobro solo. An ever better vocal track is the original “Ordinary Love,” where Abair sings in lower registers than normal in a swaying, tropical tune with banging percussion and dreamy background refrains of “aah, aah.”

Elsewhere, a melancholy sax line and haunting, midtempo melody highlight “Rain,” a tune dedicated to the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast rebuilding their lives after Hurricane Katrina. Abair’s repeated dah-dah-dah-dah-dah-dah vocalese brightens “True Blue,” while the touching, waltzlike ballad “Far Away” closes the CD with Abair’s sax melting away into anthemic-yet-dreamy wordless vocals. ---Brian Soergel, jazztimes.com

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