

Dazzling Blue

THE MUSIC OF PAUL SIMON

Alexis Cole



Alexis Cole Dazzling Blue

Alexis Cole: vocals
Jeff Haynes: percussion
Gus Courtsunis : percussion
Marvin Sewell: guitar
Mark Peterson: bass
Maria Quintanilla: background vocals
Evan Sundquist: background vocals
Julie Harris: flute

1. St. Judy's Comet 3:03

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

2. Jonah 3:31

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

3. Dazzling Blue 4:35

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

4. Something So Right 6:20

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

5. Another Galaxy 5:14

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI), Brian Peter George Eno, Universal Music Publishing (PRS)

6. Nobody 3:43

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

7. Song about the Moon 4:12

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

8. Everything about It Is a Love Song 4:36

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

9. Long, Long Day 4:08

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

10. Love 4:05

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

11. That's Where I Belong 4:27

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

12. Quiet 5:15

Written by Paul Simon, Universal Music Publishing (BMI)

As the Persian poet Rumi once said, "What you are seeking is seeking you." Spinning his intimate tales for the last fifty years, Paul Simon's work embodies the passion of a keen seeker of human truths. As a songwriter, Simon crafts poems,

disguised as lyrics, that reveal the human condition with a disarming vulnerability. Combined with melodies that etch themselves into the mind of the listener, his music is made timeless.

Inspired by Simon's contributions, Alexis Cole offers this very special treatment of his music. With *Dazzling Blue*, vocalist Cole and producers David Chesky and Nicholas Prout sifted through some of Simon's lesser known compositions. Herein they are presented in unalloyed simplicity, emphasizing the incandescent quality, and unadorned beauty of his lyrics.

Ms. Cole has a marvelous voice of great depth. Her clear, warm resonance strips away all ornamentation and gets you to the marrow of the songwriter's stories. The vocals are haunting, and a testament to Cole's cross-cultural vocal training. Cole is better associated with jazz, making a name for herself with inventive presentations of the American songbook. Her adventure into the folk/roots genre that dominates this album is an interesting and daring departure.

Cole is joined by an excellent group of musicians whose collective body of work is well known to roots music aficionados. Jeff Haynes and Gus Courtsunis on percussion; Marvin Sewell on acoustic and electric guitars; Mark Peterson on bass, Julie Harris on Native American flute, and background vocals from Maria Quintanilla and Evan Sundquist; they are all an integral part of the whole.

Stark instrumentation, paired with the single binaural microphone recording technique employed by Chesky Records, create a feeling of serene privacy for the listener. You share the experience as these musicians perform for you in the comfortable confines of your living room, or as in the case of this album, commune with you in the interior of a Victorian Gothic church built in 1869.

The songs themselves are selections from five of Simon's solo albums. Chronologically they begin with his 1973 album *There Goes Rhyming Simon*, from which both the lullaby "St. Judy's Comet," and the breezy sentiment of "Something So Right," are chosen. The prophetic "Jonah," "Nobody," and "Long, Long Day," come from Simon's 1980 album (and movie of the same name) *One Trick Pony*. "Song about the Moon," a songwriter's lament, is chosen from his *Hearts & Bones* album from 1983. Simon's 2000 record *You're the One* provides the raga inspired "That's Where I Belong," the slow bossa ballad "Love," and the hymn-like "Quiet." The joyous proclamation "Everything about It Is a Love Song," and the dark "Another Galaxy," are pulled from his 2006 album *Surprise*. Finally the title cut "Dazzling Blue" is the sole composition from his 2011 release *So Beautiful or So What*.

"St. Judy's Comet" is a lullaby of sweetness and wit. Written for Simon's son Harper Simon, the self-referential line, "'cause if I can't sing my boy to sleep, it makes your famous Daddy look so dumb," makes us all grin. Backup vocals by Evan Sundquist adds a layer of charm to the sweetness.

Simon's "Jonah" is introspective, swallowed not by a whale, but by his drive to create and perform his music. Cole's voice betrays a hint of melancholy while expressing the sometimes lonely life of the bar circuit traveling singer/songwriter. This interpretation perfectly captures the sublime resignation of Simon's character portrait.

West African inspired rhythms drive the spirit of "Dazzling Blue," purportedly written by Simon for his wife Edie Brickell, whose favorite color is blue. This one features the percussive rhythm section of Peterson, Haynes and Courtsunis, with Marvin Sewell's steel stringed guitar. Cole sings the plaintive "Dazzling Blue" with a bare simplicity reminiscent of a young Joan Baez. Deft harmonies filigree over the vocals adding to the simple elegance of this tale of love discovered.

"Something So Right," might be the most immediately recognizable of Simon's songs on this album. Here, the master songwriter invites the listener into the tender emotions of love, and how hard it is to get used to "something so right." Cole's smooth vocals, paired with Sewell's tight guitar work provide this interpretation with intricate interplay. The piece ends with Cole's extended vocalization that floats like a feather on an afternoon breeze.



Sewell's reverberated guitar chords, suspended in Haynes cajón rhythms, lead off Simon's "Another Galaxy." Cole's gentle vocal glides through the rhythm, proclaiming hope for a brighter future in "another life, another galaxy."

Simon's unconventional and bluesy "Nobody" fits perfectly with Cole's jazz roots. Sewell's dirty guitar sounds really bring out the grit of the blues.

The hymnal quality of this treatment of “Song about the Moon” expands on the original from *Hearts & Bones* and takes us to the altar of the muse. This instructional for songwriters takes on a gospel-like chant with a chorus of interwoven voices humming through the melody at the end.

The haunting “Everything about It Is a Love Song” has the emotional weight of an Appalachian dirge. Driving bongos create the backdrop over which Cole intones the lyrics, which conjure metaphors from nature, such as “riverbank of my imagination,” and “frost creeping over the pond,” and a prayer of hope and redemption in such lines as “wait for the hour of my rescue.”

“Long Long Day” is another ballad pulled from Simon’s experiences of being a traveling musician. Simon’s cry of weariness is given new depth with Cole’s plaintive delivery about of a lifetime of struggle. Highlights include a particularly sweet introductory guitar phrase, and some delicate slide work by the ever tasteful Marvin Sewell.

The stark, percussion driven “Love” features inspired riffs from Sewell’s guitar that are slightly reminiscent of sixties surfer music. Cole’s alto is deep and resonant as she sings the chorus of “Love.” Throughout it all, Cole adds just the right inflections to the repeating refrain.



“That’s Where I Belong” begins with a slow evocative vocal improvisation over a drone. The lyrics are an invocation to the cosmic imperative of finding your place in the world by doing your hearts work and having love in your life. An upbeat musical break adds levity to the gravitas of the homily.

The mournful “Quiet” is the finale of this deeply personal album. Cole sings this with a gentle peacefulness conjuring up the tranquility that this music brings to bear. Sewell’s modulating guitar is eerily transcendent, and Harris’ native flute work has a deeply spiritual feel. Cole’s voice takes on a bit of a brogue accent as she recites Simon’s self-revelatory words that warn that ambition can be “handcuffs on the soul or worse.”

Dazzling Blue strips away all measure of pretense and presents songs by the singer/songwriter Paul Simon in all their unvarnished beauty. The album allows the sentiment of those lyrics to speak for themselves through the authentic voice of Alexis Cole and the accomplished, sensitive musicians chosen to bring this work to life.

—Ralph A. Miriello

Produced by David Chesky & Nicholas Prout

Co-producers: Alexis Cole & Jeff Haynes

Executive Producer: Norman Chesky

Recorded, edited, and mastered by Nicholas Prout

Second Engineer: Mor Mezrich

Assistant Engineer: Max Steen

General Assistant: Michael Christie

A&R: Jeff Lanier

Design: Jeff Wong

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Session Photos: Alan Nahigian

Recorded September 23rd, 2015 at The Hirsch Center, Brooklyn, New York

Equipment Used: B & K Binaural Head, MSB A/D Converter, and Crystal Microphone Cable

Special thanks to Professor Edgar Choueiri of the 3D Audio and Applied Acoustics (3D3A) Lab of Princeton University, for his technical assistance on the 3D audio aspects of this binaural recording