

Nancy Kelly *Well, Alright!* (Saying it With Jazz SIWJ 0309)

The best things in life, and jazz, happen spontaneously. Which brings us directly to Ms Kelly, who again has teamed up with tenorist Houston Person. They collaborated in '06 on *Born to Swing*; now their unique rapport graces a fledgling label in Bellevue, WA, *Saying It With Jazz*. Kelly and Person say it with eloquence, spread over eleven live tracks, backed by a highly responsive rhythm section: pianist Randy Halberstadt; bassist Jeff Johnson; and drummer Gary Hobbs. **Kelly gives a master class on every track**, belting "But Not For Me" at supersonic speed, avoiding words as if they were road-blocks, but never losing the jazz pulse. Person quotes from "Third Man Theme;" Halberstadt offers his own, from "Surrey With the Fringe." Kelly comes roaring back for the out chorus, resorting to scat for the title. "Who Can I Turn To" gives Kelly a chance to channel Carmen McRae; Anita O'Day is conjured up during "I Only Have Eyes," containing Kelly's signature visceral growl. Her range comes in handy on "Let's Fall in Love:" she ends on the fifth, then suddenly swoops an octave higher. The girl's fearless; does it again at the end of "Let It Be Me." The title tune gives Halberstadt his solo highlight: Brubeck-flavored. Person's tour de force comes on "Since I Fell For You." Billie Holiday's "Fine & Mellow" evolves into a shuffle-shout, call-and-response with Kelly's adoring audience. That's how it went all night: the humor of a jazz conversation with everyone hearing each other; no need for arrangements. Person is a sensitive listener, filling in Kelly's gaps with intelligent comments. The two must be joined at the hip -- very hip. – **Harvey Siders, *Jazztimes***

"Recorded in towards the end of 2008 at Bake's Place, an intimate club in Issaquah (in the state of Washington), Nancy turns her attention to some show and pop songs from the 1960s and a generous sprinkling of blues. Among the songs she sings are 'But Not For Me', 'I Love Being Here With You', 'Let's Fall in Love' and 'Alright, Okay, You Win'. The result is an electric performance, one that underlines the praise prompted from me by her first CD. This time, Nancy has a different backing trio: Randy Halberstadt on piano, Jeff Johnson on bass and Gary Hobbs on drums. She is, however, again joined by tenor saxophonist Houston Person, whose biting take on the blues is a special joy. Just as joyful is Nancy's singing voice. She has a similarly biting approach to some of the lyrics, curtailing some words in the interest of the dynamic swing she imparts. There are also many occasions throughout this wholly admirable set when she sets the spine a-tingling in a way that so few of today's singers can manage. Run, don't walk for this one." - **This review from Bruce Crowther (website)**

NANCY KELLY/Well Alright: "Did someone say we had a problem with the golden age of broads? I don't think so. Kelly is right in the pocket with a return to the last hurrah of the golden age of broads, the 60s, when supper clubs still roamed the earth and were populated by swinging kitties that knew how to take a song and a room on their own terms in high style. Yeah, kind of like the original Ramsey Lewis Trio hitting it at the London House with some solid thrush, that's what this feels like. Lewis understands white space and laying out to let her cats swing as well. A dandy throwback vocal date from a pro that keeps proving her chops with each new session. Hot stuff." - **Chris Spector, *Midwest Record***

"It is, I believe, safe to categorize **NANCY KELLY** as a jazz singer. There is always a lot of debate about that designation, but there are times when debate is unnecessary, and it is intuitively obvious to any aware listener a given individual meets the nebulous parameters that form some kind of definition of what is a jazz singer. Listen to *Well, Alright* (Saying It With Jazz – 309), and I expect that you will agree with my opinion of Kelly. She swings, she reconceives melodies, she phrases like an instrumentalist and, by the way, she is hip. With the backing of Houston Person on tenor sax, Randy Halberstadt on piano, Jeff Johnson on bass and Gary Hobbs on drums, Kelly invests her eleven-song program with plenty of energy, and respect for her material. There are traces of many jazz singers who preceded her, most noticeably, Anita O'Day, for her rhythm, Carmen McRae for her attitude, and several of the more blues-based singers for her sound. If you decide to add this terrific CD to your collection, "well, alright, OK, you win!" - **Review from "Jersey Jazz."**

"There is a long line of female singers standing ready to receive the torch carried by greats of the past like Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, June Christy, Carmen Mc Rae and Anita O'Day. When you hear Nancy Kelly do her thing on "Well Alright," you will hear one of those rare voices of today, one honed through practice and listening and becoming a jazz person. There are jazz singers, and there are jazz singers. Some in that category are as different as night and day. It's a fair question to ask. "Where does Nancy Kelly fit in?" She's more Anita O'Day than Carmen Mc Rae. Nancy is blessed with an innate sense of swing, a true rhythm singer. The warm welcoming room of Bake's Club in Issaquah, Washington proved to be the perfect fit for her group of Seattle pianist Randy Halberstadt, bassist Jeff Johnson, Portland, Oregon drummer Gary Hobbs and special guest, tenor saxophone legend Houston Person. Kelly takes Billie Holiday's "Fine and Mellow," updates the lyric a bit, throws in a growling chorus and even elicits a call and response with the audience. Person's tenor is emphatically eloquent. Other tunes include: "Alright, OK You Win," "Let It Be Me," "For Once in My Life." "I Wish You Love," "But Not for Me," and "Let's Fall in Love." I love her interpretations of so many great songs. She's both old school and new. She's experienced yet her delivery and ideas are fresh. She has great jazz chops and sings with a pure honesty." - **Dick Bogle, *Jazz program writer***

NANCY KELLY: WELL, ALRIGHT! LIVE! "Veteran singer and Rochester native Nancy Kelly is in fabulous form in this new set, recorded in a Bellevue, Wa., nightclub. Saxophonist Houston Person and his band provide swinging support for this rousing set of standards, including "Alright, Okay, You Win," "Let's Fall In Love," an upbeat take on "But Not for Me" and one of my all-time favorites, "Since I Fell for You," beautifully performed in bluesy tandem with Person. Beyond her commendable tonal quality and range, Kelly is a powerfully rhythmic singer, and plenty soulful. She remains head and shoulders among many in the crowded field of female jazz vocalists." -**Jack Garner, *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle***

"My god--that was liquid fun, wasn't it? Anyone who can listen to that cd and not smile is someone I don't want to know. You were incredible!" - **Randy Halberstadt**