



Thoughtful, smart, artful, heartfelt and sometimes funny, the songs co-written and performed by Anya Turner (vocals) and Robert Grusecki (piano and some vocals) make *Labor of Love* lovely—and anything but labored. There's a serenity here, a professionalism that maintains a maturity and naturalness. The pair's mutual affection and desire to communicate feelings and observations which we can all share make us, as listeners, feel that we know them. In their warmest, most accessible, and most secure outing (and one nicely balanced in tone), they deliver the goods memorably and effectively.

The well-crafted songwriting has grace and elegance, but is always direct and delivered without artifice. They seem comfortable in their own skins. That's evident throughout, and boldly stated in the opening piece as Anya sings smoothly and with bliss about feeling "At Home in the World." The lyric includes plainspoken, confident declarations ("No one can tell me that I'm out of place") and a rewardingly deft, decorative alliteration ("Finding my niche in the nick of time/ No longer lost and lonely"). They can be serene or sincere or saucy. In the strutting nose-thumbing at aging, crowing that "Fifty Is the New Twenty-Five," she tosses off comments about dealing with "hormones, implants, transplants/ Does it show?/No, no, no/ Like all the bitches, I'm just rappin'." As she gets carried away, Robert intones, mantra-like, "Fifty, fifty, fifty" over some of her insistent repeats singing the title.

Totally adorable in music and lyric is the song they wrote about writing a song: "How Do You Write a Song." They sing this one together and its embrace of the process and frustrations ("You hum, you pace, you moan, you mutter/ You laugh, you cry, you curse, you sputter") shows they can practice what they preach ("You weave the music and words/ With deep expression and much compression"). Taking the steps of creativity a step further, they have another number about the trials and tribulations and the long haul of mounting a musical from idea to closing: "We Wrote a Show" ("Rewrites, long nights, don't get sick ... The critics came/ Some of them loved it"). It will ring true with anyone with a first-hand knowledge of putting out energy (and money) for a show from scratch as a labor of love.

Especially tender and strong—perhaps like their subjects—are two songs dedicated to parents: "Paul" for the struggles of his father, "Janet" ("And Like That") for the proudly self-sufficient, simple lifestyle of her mother. Both sing with a lot of heart throughout the album. Robert's piano playing is graceful and efficient, never flowery or fluttery. On this album, they're joined by one other musician: guitarist John Putnam, who seems a skillful and kindred musical spirit.

A common wisdom states that, in writing, universality can come from well-etched detail. You get that with Anya and Robert. Add to that sensitive, honest, down-to-earth singing, and more than a touch of class.

- Rob Lester
Talkin' Broadway
04/10/14