



Naama Gheber *Dearly Beloved*

CELLAR 100119

★★★★½

Vocalist Naama Gheber specializes in standards from the '30s and '40s, when romantic, often obsessive love songs countered the harsh realities of the Great Depression and World War II. While she's hardly the first young vocalist to revisit that canon in our own uneasy times, the Israeli-born Brooklynite brings a fresh perspective and emotional nuance to the Great American Songbook on her debut album, which was honed during a yearlong residency at West Village club Mezzrow.

Gheber also has a crack ensemble backing her up. Steve Nelson's vibes sing on the opening title track, winging us back to a smoky '30s cocktail lounge. Ray Gallon's keyboards and David Wong's bass keep the conversation lively on swinging uptempo numbers like "S Wonderful," while Aaron Kimmel's drums conjure up the tropical jungle of an obsessed heart on "So In Love." But it's Gheber's skill at finding the emotional core of every song that gives the album its heart.

On her tour de force "So In Love," Gheber's voice evokes a honeyed warmth in the opening lines, then swoops up and plummets down into lovestruck madness with Cole Porter's quintessentially masochistic lyrics. Elsewhere, her voice drifts into a pillow of dreams on a lovely version of "Good Night My Love (Layla Tov)," which conflates the old standard with a lullaby from her own Israeli childhood.

It's a promising debut for a vocalist who's only started to tap the wellspring of romantic standards on her first album, which augurs well for future releases. —Cree McCree

Dearly Beloved: Dearly Beloved; So In Love; 'S Wonderful; Since I Fell For You; I Can't Give You Anything But Love; Get Out Of Town; This Time The Dream's On Me; You Stepped Out Of A Dream; What's New; Just Squeeze Me; Sometimes I'm Happy; Good Night My Love (Layla Tov). (50:38)

Personnel: Naama Gheber, vocals; Steve Nelson, vibraphone; Ray Gallon, piano; David Wong, bass; Aaron Kimmel, drums.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com