

DAKOTA STATON AND MORGANA KING by Scott Yanow

Dakota Staton (1930-2007) was one of the great singers of the 1950s. Morgana King (1930-2018) gained fame as both a singer and an actress. Both of these vocalists have recently had their earliest recordings reissued on two-CD sets released by Acrobat Music.

Dakota Staton had a powerful voice from the start of her career, able to hit passionate high notes with ease. Dinah Washington was her main influence, when she occasionally scatted she hinted strongly at Ella Fitzgerald, and the fullness of her wide range was comparable to Sarah Vaughan's. The Complete Early Years 1955-58 starts off with 16 songs from 1954-56 that were originally released as singles. From the first numbers, "My Heart's Delight" and "What Do You Know About Love," she displays an assertive no-nonsense style that makes one surprised that none of these early numbers were hits. While the unidentified bands often play clichés with repetitious tenor and rhythmic patterns by the pianists, the singing should have made Staton into a star. Perhaps the rise of rock and roll hurt her chances.

She had better luck after that with the jazz-oriented Capitol albums The Late Late Show, Dynamic, and Crazy He Calls Me which are reissued in full on this twofer along with her half of In The Night. The latter was a collaboration with the George Shearing Quintet; the instrumentals are not included here. Nelson Riddle and Van Alexander provided the arrangements for an album apiece and there are some short solos along the way including from trumpeter Harry "Sweets" Edison, pianists Shearing and Hank Jones, and a trombonist who might be Jimmy Cleveland.

"The Late Late Show" was easily Dakota Staton's most popular song but she does justice to all 55 selections (most of them superior standards) on the comprehensive reissue. Her consistently dazzling singing during these early years (she was just 28 when this release ends in 1958) makes this a highly recommended twofer.

Morgana King always had a beautiful voice. A song stylist rather than a fulltime jazz singer whose background was in opera and Italian music, she was able to improvise and swing in a subtle style when the setting was right. The Early Years (Classic Albums 1956-59) reissues all of the music from her first four albums plus two singles.

For You, For Me, Forever More has her joined by an orchestra in 1956. While the ballads are taken pretty straight, she displays her jazz chops on some of the medium-tempo songs including "There's A Lull In My Life" and "Delovely." Morgana Sings The Blues is performed with a quartet that often includes pianist Harvey Leonard on celeste and guitarist Barry Galbraith; vibraphonist Terry Gibbs guests on "It's Only A Paper Moon." Despite its title, only one of the dozen songs are blues ("Frankie And Johnnie") and this album actually a tribute to the famous torch singer Helen Morgan.

King performs a vintage repertoire from the 1920s and 30s with three being from the classic Kern/Hammerstein musical Show Boat. The other two albums, Let Me Love You and Greatest Songs Ever Swung, have the singer joined by a sextet or a big band arranged by Ernie Wilkins with most of the jazz interest being heard in the solos of her sidemen. But fans of the singer's voice will find much to enjoy during these melodic and tasteful outings.

Both the Dakota Staton and Morgana King sets are available from www.amazon.com and www.mvdb2b.com.

- Scott Yanow