



## Dee Bell

### RECORD COMPANY

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### TRACK LIST: DEE-VOCALS

**Watch What Happens:** with Houston Person, Al Plank, John Wiitala, Colin Bailey. (*rubato, then up medium swing*)

**You Can't Go Home Again:** with John Stowell, Al Plank, John Wiitala, Colin Bailey, Michael Spiro. (*Dee's lyrics to Don Sebesky's tune for Chet Baker -bossa ballad*)

**Dear Bix:** with Houston Person, Al Plank, John Wiitala, Colin Bailey. (*swing ballad*)

**You're My Thrill:** with John Stowell, Al Plank, John Wiitala, Colin Bailey, Michael Spiro. (*rubato, then Afro 6/8*)

**Isfahan:** with Person, Plank, Wiitala, Bailey (*ballad - Dee's lyrics*)

**I Remember You:** with (same as above) (*medium swing*)

**Comes Love:** Stowell, Plank, Wiitala, Bailey, Spiro. (*funk jazz*)

**The Peacocks:** Stowell, Plank, Wiitala, Spiro. (*dreamscape ballad - Dee's lyrics*)

**If Dreams Come True:** Person, Plank, Wiitala, Bailey. (*up swing*)

**I'll Never Be the Same:** Plank, Wiitala. (*ballad*)

## Sagacious Grace Liner Notes

At long last, a new recording by Dee Bell.

The pure-voiced singer, whose supple phrasing and unforced feeling draw you deep into a song, put out two smashing records on the Concord label in the 1980s that made the jazz world sit up and listen. The first, "Let There Be Love," featured the sublime saxophonist Stan Getz, who heard something special in Dee's uncluttered singing. Trumpeter Tom Harrell played on the equally well-received "One by One." Now, after a 20-year delay, comes "Sagacious Grace," a beautiful collection of songs dedicated to the memory of Al Plank, the swinging and elegant pianist who was Dee's close collaborator and a revered figure on the San Francisco jazz scene for 40 years. A prized accompanist with a crystalline touch and rich sense of harmony, Al shaped the music on this CD. He arranged many of the tunes, artfully accompanies Dee and the two prime soloists - guitarist John Stowell and tenor saxophonist Houston Person - and improvises lyrical solos that never waste a note. His spacious playing was equally informed by Frederic Chopin and Nat King Cole.

The tracks on "Sagacious Grace" - the title refers to Al's keen mind and wit - were recorded in 1990, 13 years before he died of cancer at the age of 70. The musicians were thrilled when they heard the playbacks. But when the tracks were compressed during the mastering process, the sound of John Wiitala's bass was badly distorted due to a misplaced microphone. After two failed attempts to re-engineer the tapes, Dee sadly discarded the project. Then a couple of years ago, she ran into Bud Spangler, the drummer and radio producer, whom she hadn't seen in 20 years. She mentioned the ill-fated recordings, and he offered to fix them. Using Pro Tools, Bud and the wizardly engineer Dan Feiszli removed the distortion, allowing Dee to finally release this pleasing recording.

The clarity and warmth of Dee's voice comes shining through in the first phrases of "Watch What Happens," the tart, medium-tempo opener that features one of several soulful Person solos. Al's arrangement of "You Can't Go Home Again" floats in a slow bossa-nova groove. Dee wrote the lyrics, inspired by the painful experience of leaving her family and Indiana home after a failed relationship. She sings it with the bittersweet longing that the Portuguese call *saudade*. Al's piano gently ripples under her sighing phrases.

"I love his waterfall piano line under the vocal," Dee says. "Al's solo on this cut always brings tears." The pianist's taste and sensitivity made everyone he played with sound better. Among others, he worked with Wes Montgomery, Woody Herman, Chet Baker and Anita O'Day. He and Dee are completely in synch here, breathing together on the out-of-time intro to "You're My Thrill," which slips into a 6/8 Afro-Cuban groove. Inspired by "the essence of Abbey Lincoln," Dee sings the song with simmering passion. She wrote the arrangement, which features Colin Bailey's crisp drumming, ace percussionist Michael Spiro on congas and a dancing Stowell guitar solo.

Dee dips into her sensuous lower register on "Isfahan," the luxurious Billy Strayhorn tune from Ellington's "Impressions from the Far East Suite" whose lyrics she wrote based on the composer's impressions of the glimmering Persian city. She and Al collaborated on the dreamscape arrangement of Jimmy Rowles' hauntingly beautiful "The Peacocks." It's an affecting performance. Written after her father's death, Dee's lyrics speak in poetic terms about rising from depression. Joy springs forth in the swinging up-tempo numbers, "I Remember You" and "If Dreams Come True," and when Dee sings the ballad "I'll Never Be the Same," you believe her. Al underscores the wistful mood with his rich chordal accompaniment and a singing, heartfelt solo that reminds you what a marvelous musician he was. Sagacious grace, indeed.

- by Jesse Hamlin,

San Francisco jazz writer