

## CD Review: Eddie Bruce, *The Magic and Music of Tony Bennett*.

When the legendary Tony Bennett left us in 2023 at age 96, he was rightly hailed as the last of the great saloon singers - those supremely talented vocal stylists who made their name interpreting the Great American Songbook with taste, sophistication and swing. While no one could truly replace Bennett, Philadelphia singer Eddie Bruce comes closer than most with his superb new album “*The Magic and Music of Tony Bennett*.”

This isn't a case of mimicry, but rather a heartfelt homage by a vocalist who deeply absorbed and internalized Bennett's approach. Like Bennett, Bruce has a warm, intimate baritone that breathes new life into classic songs like “Smile,” “Emily” and “The Shadow of Your Smile.” He navigates the tricky melodic intervals with ease and invests each lyric with meaning and emotional truth. Bruce fully captures Bennett's impeccable diction and phrasing without lapsing into mere imitation.

What sets Bruce apart is his own distinctive jazz sensibility. He can handle up-tempo swingers like “I Got Rhythm” and the live “It Don't Mean a Thing” with the same aplomb as Bennett, revealing his own formidable scatting skills on the latter track. But he also has a knack for reinventing songs through daring arrangements, like transforming the usually bombastic “I Got Lost in Her Arms” into a pensive, film noir-ish tone poem for voice and trio.

The album is impeccably produced, with Bruce surrounding himself with a crack band including pianist Dean Schneider, whose arrangements pay loving tribute to Bennett's while putting his own stamp on them. Schneider's intro to “Emily” slyly shifts keys, while his chart on “Old Devil Moon” deftly blends Latin and swing feels. The late, great Philadelphia guitarist Rudy Troccoli is also featured on two intimate voice-and-guitar tracks, “But Beautiful” and “The Shadow of Your Smile.”

Three live tracks from 2022 are included, whetting the appetite for Bruce's undoubtedly electrifying shows. “It Don't Mean a Thing” swings hard, with Bruce trading fours with his band and tossing off some dazzling scatting. “The Good Life/I Wanna Be Around” medley showcases his ease with a medley, something Bennett excelled at. And the jaunty “What Are You Afraid Of?” allows Bruce to channel Bennett's rakish charm and wit.

While no one could replace the immortal Bennett, “*The Magic and Music of Tony Bennett*” makes a strong case for Eddie Bruce as a worthy standard-bearer for keeping this music vital and alive. Like Bennett, Bruce isn't just going through the motions - he's utterly committed to upholding the highest artistic standards of the American songbook tradition. This album is a must for Bennett fans, but also for anyone who values impeccable taste, swinging rhythm and honest emotion in vocal jazz.

**Steven James**  
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