

TURNINGPOINT

Kiwi connection



Singer LOUISE GIBBS on the album that changed her life, *Ondas* by Mike Nock. INTERVIEW: BRIAN GLASSER

“ I thought this would be really difficult, and open a can of worms. But actually I immediately knew what my choice would be. It's a little obscure, I know; and probably not on most people's lists. But you have to imagine a young woman growing up in Auckland, New Zealand. I'd started classical piano lessons at around 10, and I kept giving them up because I thought, this really doesn't suit me – I can't fit into this. By the time I was 14, I was starting to get interested in jazz – it was like a sideline, a parallel universe that I entered. I entered on my own, because my family weren't interested and my teachers were certainly not interested. I should have realised after my second lesson, when I took some pieces that I had made up to my teacher, and she was utterly horrified. She was a lovely woman, but she said: 'Don't you ever, ever do that again – you'll never become a proper pianist.' I might have melted away, but I just thought, that's the last time you're going to hear anything of mine. So I guess that was the beginning of my parallel life.

I also remember hearing Thelonious Monk, when I was babysitting for the family across the road. The man had some Monk recordings – I don't know how he'd have come by them. I didn't get it at all; and later I came across *Bitches Brew*, and it was the same thing: I didn't get it, but I was really fascinated by it. I suppose I was about 16. I was singing by then so I was getting into swing and then bebop. In Auckland, it turned out there was a jazz community, of sorts. When I was 15, I'd responded to an ad in the paper: 'Wanted – singers from Bach to Bacharach.' I joined this vocal group and unbeknownst to me they were doing all the radio and television backing. I was one of a four-part group; and so from that time, I was a professional musician and getting money that I couldn't imagine! Through that, I met all the session musicians – and they were really into jazz. A sax player called Bob Gillett, an American, put a lot of listening my way.

Pianists have always been important to me, because I'm a pianist. I listen with a certain sensibility: an interest in the instrument, the

harmonic explorations, as well as people like McCoy Tyner – that musical drive. As a teenager, I didn't like pop – I loved Motown and R&B and on our television we heard Mahalia Jackson. That really black music spoke to me. My mother was part Samoan, and I was connected with the Pacific community, and the way they made music. I think that's why I got to play by ear, because that's the way those musicians learned.

Anyway, my learning was all through listening, or other musicians. I'd never had any tuition in jazz until the Jamey Aebersold course in around 1979. The musicians there kept saying, 'Do you know Mike Nock? He's a Kiwi!' I'd never heard of him, so I thought I'd do some homework. I came across *In, Out and Around*, and I really liked that. But it was when I heard *Ondas* that a lot of things really came together. This was something that really spoke to me.

It pointed a way forward – not that I took on that style, but it was the sensibility. It brought together things I knew and valued, like Ravel, who I'd always loved playing on the piano, and a New Zealand composer called Douglas Lilburn who'd written some piano pieces using quartile harmony. It definitely has something NZ about it – the sparseness and simplicity. Its significance was cemented for me when I went to do post-grad study at Columbia in New York. I could only take half-a-dozen cassettes with me; and *Ondas* became my soundtrack for living there. It reminded me of spaciousness in a place that was crowded with buildings and people. Every time I put it on, I felt like I entered this spacious world. There's even a piece called 'Land of the Long White Cloud', which is the Maori name for New Zealand. It also had a track that was on *In, Out and Around* called 'Forgotten Love'. Here it was recast in an ECM setting that was very new to me. So the record brought me to everything that ECM represented – a completely different sound world, which chimed with my homeland geography as well as offering a musical alternative to straight-ahead jazz. It was everything that bebop wasn't.

I didn't notice the international mix of musicians at time; I just heard music. Most of us are racially blind. But now it occurs to me, I wonder why he chose those people? They never recorded in that format again. Mike was really into Brazilian music. It comes through with certain pulses on this record, and maybe that had some impact on his choice of Eddie Gomez. But anyway, it's great to fling things together and make it work. This album came to represent for me making the decision to leave NZ; and saying 'OK, there's a whole other world that's not bebop, it's not swing, it's not jazz as we know it.' By the time I went to New York, I knew Mike. He'd spent some time back in NZ, and I'd got to know him well – he'd given me my copy of *Ondas*, in fact, which also makes it a special record for me. You couldn't find a more generous person; and everyone says that about him. **”**



Mike Nock
Ondas ECM

TRACKS :: 'Forgotten Love'; 'Ondas'; 'Visionary'; 'Land of the Long White Cloud'; and 'Doors'

PERSONNEL :: Mike Nock (p), Eddie Gomez (b), and Jon Christensen (d).
Rec. 1982