



Language

Lorraine Feather

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By Nicholas F. Mondello [Discuss](#)



By its very title, *Language*, from singer and lyricist Lorraine Feather, implies that Feather and company believe that they have the musical and linguistic chops to take on such a sophisticated concept for our entertainment. So it's good to find that Feather is a heavyweight who—with a championship caliber crew in her corner—delivers a resounding KO.

To some ears, story songs—word-intense tunes—may seem overly Broadwaysque and theatrical. Sometimes such songs shade goofy into gimmick novelty. Where's the balance? Is it words or melodies? Do we have complex, witty turns of a phrase over boring melodic and rhythmic drones? Or the other thing? Compare out-of-balance word-intense tunes with a grail like “Lush Life.”

Happily, no such conflict arises on this entertaining and thoughtful album. From the stop-and-pulse, streetbeat start of “Traffic and Weather,” Feather and her band demonstrate that they're going for something unique. *Language* is a marvelous mix of sharp, thoughtful verbiage, edgy melodies, quirky rhythms and superior musicianship.

Feather's lyric pen demonstrates an uncanny eye for the eccentricities and Looney Tune-acies of post-modern Life. “We Appreciate Your Patience,” a tale of off-putting technology and alienation, has her shading nicely over a “Maiden Voyage”ish rhythmic foundation. Guitarist Grant Geissman delivers riffs and nuance. The effect is nicely spooky. Feather raps “Very Unbecoming,” a quirky but upbeat Latin tune.

Feather's ability to deliver a balladic lyric with emotion shines so beautifully on pianist Shelly Berg's sentimental “I Love New York At Christmas.” This beautiful, romantic effort is something we're likely to hear for years to come. Feather's vocal chops are right there, too. Check out the last octave. Sweetness. And, Berg's sensitive touch will move you throughout.

Launched by Michael Shapiro's percussion intro, “Home Alone” commences broodingly over piano and bass unison. “Quiet Village” suggests itself at first blush. This is a haunting tune that

rolls and vamps. Feather dedicated it to mystery writer Sue Grafton's creation, detective Kinsey Millhone, who likes to live in her own solitude.

On their hip, breakneck tempoed take on sports cliches, "Hit The Ground Runnin,'" the ensemble tears with the energy of...well, let's avoid sports cliché. Suffice to say, it's clever, wry and just great fun. Russ Ferrante's piano comps and stride break are outstanding.

Desperation. Frustration. Panic. What better ways to describe losing your keys? "Where Are My Keys?" demos Feather's ability to take the mundane slice-of-life rap and spin it so cleverly, while swinging with vocal acrobatics. The rhythm section pounds and throbs a la heartbeat.

"In Flower," a beautiful, elegant waltz, shines madly. Written in honor of long-time Ellington collaborator, Billy Strayhorn, Berg's music and Feather's perfect word choice probably have the team in the Upstairs Room smiling. Berg's piano touch is an added jewel. This track is the CD's pinnacle.

"Waiting Tables." The ultimate "day gig!" A breakneck, be-bopping-on-forever ensemble drops this burner on the plate. Trumpeter, producer and all-around master studio marvel, Gary Grant gives us a terrific, be-boppish solo over solid baritone roots and fifths. Frantic, here and there. Think "KoKo" and "Salt Peanuts." Stop time as backing vocalists Janis Siegel and Cheryl Bentene and the ensemble frantically conclude.

"A Household Name," all about the price and peril of fame, boogies into a melody that has an older, vaudevillian feel. The lyric flows over Michael Valerio's lumbering, quirky arco bass line and Berg's rippling piano. A nostalgic, "Making It Up As We Go Along" is reminiscent of an older, far away tune. Feather's balladic touch is just right, not syrupy or clinging as she delivers her own lyrics and Eddie Arkin's melodic lines. Mike Lang's piano is just so beautiful. No wonder he's on everything out of Hollywood except the sign.

Lorraine Feather entertains and enlivens throughout the entirety of Language. There's no gimmickry or insincerity here. This is honest stuff—like great language always is, whether it be written, read, spoken or sung. With the talent on board and the tools with which to work, it must have been an absolute hoot to produce and record. Also, a word about the production values here: outstanding. The sound balance of the recording is near perfection. Now, there's an appropriate word.

This is a disc to enjoy and reach for repeatedly. It will make you think, feel and smile-about language, life, love and, oh yes, another "L." Five stars.

Tracks: Traffic and Weather; We Appreciate Your Patience; Very Unbecoming; I Love New York at Christmas; Home Alone; Hit the Ground Runnin'; Where Are My Keys?; In Flower; Waiting Tables; A Household Name; Making It Up As We Go Along.

Personnel: Lorraine Feather: vocals; Cheryl Bentyne, Janis Siegel, Tierney Sutton: additional vocals; Shelly Berg, Russell Ferrante, Mike Lang: piano; Grant Geissman: guitar; Michael Valerio: bass; Gregg Field: drums; Michael Shapiro: drums, percussion; Gary Grant, Willie Murillo: trumpets; William Liston, Greg Smith: saxophones; Andy Martin: trombone.