

DENISE DONATELLI  
WHISTLING IN THE DARK ... the music of Burt Bacharach

**Notes by producer Larry Klein**

*“There’s an insular quality to what life has been like within the context of Covid and that kind of insularity, that contained quality to life is contemplative. It’s a feeling that sends you to this melancholic kind of place and that’s where the record lives. That’s where these songs speak from and where I think where we crafted the record to speak from.”*

*“What my idea from the very beginning was to strip down the arrangement specifics and go to the embryonic kind of germs of the songs: the melody, the harmony, and the building blocks of the structure and take away the specifics of these songs that have become so iconic. But also take the songs and reframe them in a way that is absolutely ... I guess you’d call it minimalist.”*

*“What we endeavored to do was to set these songs in a jazz environment, but without the trappings of jazz ... without long solos, without the exact instrumentation that you might expect ... Rather than being a jazz album, that it is to my mind, it is a dream of a jazz album.”*

*“Part of the reason that I suggested the idea of reinterpreting, reframing, or reimagining the music of Burt Bacharach was to try and get Denise to explore some new territory for herself as an artist and to draw her out of the traditional quote on quote standards area of jazz and into a new less-defined area.”*

*“What we did is present these songs in a way that make it more visceral for most people. Where they can follow the lyrics and the story that the poetry of the song tells. Denise’s delivery slices into them and really speaks to the deepest part of who they are, and what their life has been like and all these kinds of difficult and confusing vicissitudes that we find ourselves up against in life. These songs tell stories about what it’s like to live a life in the world that we live in. They’re really quite profound in a poetic and musical way.”*

*“Denise is understating things in a really extreme way and investigating this area between spoken word and sung lyrics. It’s quite difficult. This environment that we find ourselves in is to have an impact on people by singing powerfully. There’s all this hyper stimulation in the world, and I don’t know who actually coined this phrase, but I like the idea that quiet is the new loud.”*

*“I don’t approach records, generally, with the idea of trying to make something that is going to be palatable to a specific group of people. When I make something, it’s to make people feel something intensely. And if Burt’s songs, speak to them and make them feel something strongly and change them inside in some way, then I feel like we’ve done our job.”*

*“Denise is such an interesting singer in that her talent, though she’s musically trained, her talent is very natural and intuitive. She has a very individual sense of melody and how to interpret melody and the inflection that she’ll use against a given line or the subtle articulations melodically of what she’ll tie to a lyric. When you hear her come off of a lyric and turn the phrase down melodically, and when she comes off of something short, all these different subtle points of how a person interprets word against melody, all of this stuff is very intuitive for her.*

*“It’s hard to describe how I find the right tone that I’m looking for in working with the musicians and coming to these arrangements because one thing that I knew, was that most of what I was after was gonna have to be gotten to and at in the room. The musicians that I chose to use, I always think of it as a very important part of what we’re going after. All of these guys (Anthony Wilson, Larry Goldings, Vinnie Colaiuta) are multilingual as musicians and open in their appreciation of different genres and different musical areas.”*

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*"For example, on **In Between the Heartaches**, what I was after in the texture of the accompaniment was something that vaguely gave me a feeling of certain records of John Coltrane with Elvin Jones playing mallets on the drums and all this space and Coltrane's voice as a saxophonist against this kind of misty space that was created by that great group. If you play the track, it's not gonna make you think "oh that's like a John Coltrane record," but the feeling of certain aspects of what we got at is a feeling that I associate with those records that are a big part of my DNA as well musically."*

*"The poetry of Burt's songs that he's written with different people, lends itself to understatement in a very strong way. These songs tell stories about what it's like to live a life in the world that we live in. They're really quite profound in a poetic way to me, and a musical way, coupled with the playing of these great musicians who I was fortunate enough to be able to work with on this record. I hope the combination of those elements and this idea of taking away a lot of the things that you're used to hearing connoted with these songs, orchestration arranging-wise, that this stuff finds its way into people's hearts and changes them."*