

Here's to Life



1. IN THE NAME OF LOVE

Writers: Estelle Levitt, Kenny Rankin
Publishing: EMI Blackwood Music Inc., Wixen Music Publishing OBO Kenny Rankin Music
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Bass: Rashaan Carter
Drums: Marcus Baylor

2. A NIGHT IN TUNISIA

Writers: John Gillespie, Frank Paparelli
Publishing: Universal-MCA Music Publishing Div. of Universal Music Corp.
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Percussion: Alejandro Lucini
Additional Percussion: James McKinney
Background Vocals: Christie Dashiell, Carl "Kokayi" Walker, James McKinney
Background vocal arrangement by James McKinney
Additional Engineering by Jeff Gruber at Bluehouse Studios, Silver Spring, MD and James McKinney at Infinite Icon Studios, Greenbelt, MD

3. LA BELLE DAME SANS REGRETS

Writers: Sting, Dominic Miller
Publishing: EMI Blackwood Music Inc.
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Percussion: Alejandro Lucini
Additional Percussion: James McKinney
Background Vocals: Christie Dashiell, James McKinney
Additional Engineering by Jeff Gruber at Bluehouse Studios, Silver Spring, MD

4. IT AIN'T NECESSARILY TOO LATE FOR LOVE

(featuring Gregoire Maret)

Medley - It Ain't Necessarily So / The Look of Love / It's Too Late

It Ain't Necessarily So Writers: George & Ira Gershwin, Dorothy & Dubose Heyward
Publishing: Songs of SMP OBO Du Bose & Heyward Memorial, WB Music Corp OBO Ira Gershwin Music, Songs of SMP OBO Frankie G Songs, Raleigh Music Publishing OBO Nokawi Music
The Look Of Love Writers: Burt Bacharach, Hal David, Magnus Skogsberg Tear
Publishing: EMI April Music Inc. OBO Colgems-EMI Music Inc.
It's Too Late Writers: Carole King, Toni Stern
Publishing: Colgems-EMI Music Inc.
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Harmonica: Gregoire Maret

5. WHEN OCTOBER GOES

Writers: Barry Manilow, Johnny Mercer
Publishing: Universal Music-Careers, WB Music Corp. OBO The Johnny Mercer Foundation
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Violins: Dr. Chelsea Green, Kendall Isidore, Dianna Said
Viola: Dawn Johnson
Cello: Elise Cuffy
String Arrangement by James McKinney
Additional Engineering by Jeff Gruber at Bluehouse Studios, Silver Spring, MD and James McKinney at Infinite Icon Studios, Greenbelt, MD
Assisted by Tony Valentine, Jr.

6. NAVIN'S DITTY

Writer: Navin Garishankar
Tabla: Navin Girishankar
Engineered by Jeff Gruber at Bluehouse Studios, Silver Spring, MD

7. STREET LIFE

Writers: Joe Sample, Will Jennings
Publishing: Chrysalis Standards Inc. OBO Four Knights Music, Irving Music Inc.
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Tabla: Navin Girishankar
Additional Percussion: James McKinney
Bass: Kevin Powe, Jr.
Background Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman, Christie Dashiell, James McKinney
Background vocal arrangement by James McKinney
Additional Engineering by Jeff Gruber at Bluehouse Studios, Silver Spring, MD and James McKinney at Infinite Icon Studios, Greenbelt, MD

8. SAVE YOUR LOVE FOR ME (featuring David Binney)

Writers: Buddy Johnson
Publishing: Embassy Music Corporation
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Bass: Matt Geraghty
Saxophone: David Binney

9. SOME PEOPLE'S LIVES

Writers: Rhonda K. Fleming, Janis Ian
Publishing: Do Write Music LLC OBO Taosongs Two, Irving Music, Inc.
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Cello: Elise Cuffy
Cello Arrangement by James McKinney
Additional Engineering by Jeff Gruber at Bluehouse Studios, Silver Spring, MD

10. WILLOW WEEP FOR ME (featuring Gregoire Maret)

Writer: Ann Ronell
Publishing: Songwriters Guild of America OBO Ann Ronell Music Co.
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Harmonica: Gregoire Maret
Bass: Matt Geraghty

11. OVERJOYED

Writer: Stevie Wonder
Publishing: EMI April-Inc. OBO Black Bull Music and OBO Jobete Music Co. Inc.
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Percussion: Alejandro Lucini
Additional Percussion by James McKinney
Additional Engineering by Jeff Gruber at Bluehouse Studios, Silver Spring, MD

12. HERE'S TO LIFE

Composers: Phyllis Molinary, Artie Butler
Publishing: Dominant Jeans Music, Artie Butler Music Inc. Division of Royce Productions
Lead Vocals: Stacey Lynn Schulman
Guitar: Alan Schulman
Violins: Kendall Isidore, Dianna Said
Viola: Dawn Johnson
Cello: Elise Cuffy
Vibraphone: James McKinney
String Arrangement by James McKinney, assisted by Tony Valentine, Jr.
Additional Engineering by Jeff Gruber at Bluehouse Studios, Silver Spring, MD

All songs Produced by James McKinney for Infinite Icon Enterprises
All songs Recorded, Engineered & Mixed by Scott Jacoby at Eusonia Studios, NY, NY
Mastered by Emily Lazar at The Lodge, assisted by Chris Allgood
Cover Art by Davide Baroni
Photography by Deneka Peniston and Tobias Everke
Design/Art Direction by Kurtis Powers



While the vocal repertoire in jazz has pivoted in the past two decades, beginning with such '90s pioneers as Cassandra Wilson and Patricia Barber who sang pop-oriented tunes from the '60s and '70s they loved in their youth, it's unfortunate that even today the majority of jazz-based singers in their recordings have cautiously returned to the deep well of the Great American Songbook established in the '40 and '50s. While they seek to lean on the successes of standards, the results are too often tame, predictable, dated, decidedly unimaginative. A truly classic song, in the wrong hands, can become a cliché.

On the other hand, there are fresh new voices emerging who throw change ups into their songbooks and adventurously and creatively pursue giving a tune its full worth. Welcome to **As Is**, the wife-and-husband team of the alluring, captivating vocalist Stacey Lynn Schulman and her husband the sparking jazz guitarist Alan Schulman. They have delivered the remarkably style-diverse 12-song album, **Here's to Life**, with each song serving as chapters of the pair's wide-ranging embrace of music that is familiar as well as wonderful.

Consider classics like **"A Night in Tunisia"** and **"Willow Weep for Me"** arranged with new colors and expression, as well as spins on popular but lesser known tunes from the pens of A-listers Sting, Stevie Wonder, the Crusaders, Janis Ian, Kenny Rankin and Barry Manilow. Plus, throw into the set list percussive tabla support from Navin Girishankar, the harmonica conversations on two tunes by the best in the jazz world Grégoire Maret, and the ruminative title song that had served as the iconic jazz vocalist Shirley Horn's signature tune.

"It was a challenge to take that on," says Stacey, who despite her growing prowess as an intrepid vocalist has been suffering with chronic Lyme disease the past eight years. "But the melody and the lyrics make it a great piece of art that is also my message about how fragile life is. Everything I was feeling when we were recording went into this song." Alan adds, "This tune has a lot of meaning to us. It's about not knowing what's in the future, but it's still all about 'here's to life.' We knew we were playing on sacred ground in paying tribute to Shirley."

The vocal showcase for Stacey is a magnificent read with support from Alan's sensitive finger-picked guitar lines and a grand string quartet arranged by the album's producer, James McKinney, who also plays vibraphone on the track. It's the superb end song to an album that features sublime performances that stretch across the spectrum of jazz expression.

The guiding principle at work on the couple's approach to rendering their tunes is to give them their own voices. "Any tune that has been done over and over we tried to do differently," says Alan, who cites as an example their grooving and swinging interpretation of Dizzy Gillespie's **"A Night in Tunisia"** that opens with the standard "Caravan" by Juan Tizol and Duke Ellington. With the unexpected mixing of the two songs from the jazz canon, the piece takes on a mys-

terious, exotic quality with Brazilian-spiced percussion by Alejandro Lucini and a three-singer vocalese choir providing the wordless bass line.

This is Stacey and Alan's second album following their splendid recording of standards, **A Love Like Ours**, recorded in a duo setting in Italy. For **Here's to Life**, they decided to enlist the Grammy-nominated James McKinney. He brings to life the arrangements with a depth and beauty that spotlights Stacey's singular voice. It also features Alan's range of acoustic and electric six-string strumming, quiet fingerpicking and single-note solos, from Brazilian to blues to swinging jazz.

The album launches in an upbeat glow, with Stacey opening with wordless vocals then deepens into the soul of the Kenny Rankin tune co-written with Estelle Levitt, **"In the Name of Love."** It was picked by Alan based on Rankin's rendition and features guest drummer Marcus Baylor's swing and Alan's soulful solo in the break. Another relatively obscure pop-oriented tune they sumptuously offer is Sting's **"La Belle Dame Sans Regrets,"** a co-write with his sideman guitarist Dominic Miller. Stacey sings it like a whisper in French while Alan's classical guitar delivers a hint of bossa nova. They create a soundscape tapestry of walking through time. The bonus is what Stacey calls, "one of the best Easter eggs of the album." She's singling out Alan quoting "Mood for a Day" from the 1971 Yes album, *Fragile*. "Lots of guitar players know that song by Steve Howe," Alan says. "What can you say? It's classical but it works in jazz. It also fits for us because it comes from the musical libraries in our heads."

It's impressive how Stacey and Alan use their strengths as artists and arrangers to meticulously interpret how a song fits with who they are as individuals. It's not a slap shot at a song, but a workshop on how it fits in with the tale of the collection. As a result, each tune becomes a chapter that creates the whole. It's "album" in the denotative sense—an anthology that speaks to where *As Is* moves today. They don't follow convention, Stacey notes, "I love change. There will be a jazz tune followed by a song that's different in expression. In each, my voice changes, we attack differently, the mood changes."

While it wasn't a big hit, the longing Barry Manilow **"When October Goes,"** based on unfinished Johnny Mercer lyrics, is rendered by Stacey as a reflective ballad with Alan's ruminations on guitar and a string quartet arrangement. They also score on Stevie Wonder's **"Overjoyed,"** with a Brazilian feel and Alejandro Lucini's intriguing lyrical rhythms that reflect what the songwriter credited in the liner notes for his song as the "environmental percussion...[of] crickets, nightingale and additional bird sounds, ocean, pebbles in pond, stone dropped, crushing leaves."

Another pleasing *As Is* tune is Kye Fleming/Janis Ian's **"Some People's Lives."** It's played as a quiet muse on the power of love by Stacey, Alan and cellist Elise Cuffy. "It's about feeling that love can't come again after heartbreak," says Stacey. "This is probably the one tune on this

record most like our first album. Very intimate. Very emotionally raw. And all about the sensitive interplay between the two of us. It's intriguing because it is lyrically about emptiness while the interplay between us is sparse in orchestration but rich in emotion."

The get-out-your-dancing-shoes showstopper is the cooking funk-jazz take on **"Street Life,"** the 1979 Crusaders hit written by Joe Sample and Will Jennings. **As Is** enlists Girishankar on tablas (who introduces the piece with a solo improvisation interlude that serves as the palate cleanser to reset the rhythmic movement of the album); the striking vocalese choir of Stacey, James and Christie Dashiell sing as a percussive instrument; and Alan unleashes a spirited soul-powered solo.

More traditional standards are given a new sheen, including the joyful, playful interpretation of Ann Ronell's **"Willow Weep for Me,"** with a guest appearance by Maret. Stacey points out that this 1932 classic is one of the few that was written by a woman. "Ann wrote this as a tribute to George Gershwin. Al's guitar work on this is perfect as he blends his love for jazz and the blues together." They decided to render the tune in a trio format, which Alan says, gives "Grégoire a chance to blow on the blues."

As Is also offers a stunning take on Buddy Johnson's gorgeous tune **"Save Your Love for Me,"** with Stacey displaying ecstasy in her torch-song vocals and Alan opening with guitar power. Guest alto saxophonist David Binney—one of the key players in the New York jazz scene—blows a romantic solo, and another New Yorker, Matt Geraghty, holds the slow, sweet bass beat. The tune was put on the map by Nancy Wilson in a 1962 setting with saxophonist Cannonball Adderley. "I have an affinity for Nancy in the keys she sings in and the material she chooses," says Stacey.

As for the guest support, Stacey dials back to a period in her twenties when she was steeped in the jazz world and even cooking healthy meals for guys in the bands including such top-tier players as Chris Potter, Scott Colley, Adam Rogers and Binney, among others, who were on the scene for the love of the craft. "David has always been an encouraging force for me to express myself musically so I wanted him to be a part of this effort," she says.

One of the most unlikely but coolly successful pieces on **Here's to Life** is the medley **"It Ain't Necessarily Too Late for Love"**—a triptych of songs of love spread out over three decades from a classic standard in the '50s (George and Ira Gershwin's **"It Ain't Necessarily So"** best known for its inclusion in *Porgy and Bess*) to AM radio hit songs in the '60s (the Bacharach & David tune "The Look of Love" made popular by Dusty Springfield) and the early '70s ("It's Too Late" by Toni Stern and Carole King from the latter's masterwork *Tapestry*). "Alan and I have been playing these together for a while," Stacey says. "So we created a portrait of 20th century music, crafting the evolution of a relationship. It's fun to play these songs live in this way.

People sing along because it's part of the library in their heads."

It's a move that ushers in jazz to an audience that may be used to opaque math-jazz or cerebral excursions or round-robin solos in swing affairs. There's heart and joy and accessibility that's grounded in song. And again, here's proof positive of **As Is** imaginatively going beyond expectations.

The delivery is recorded as a trio, with Maret opening the piece soulfully with a sense of Bess's moaning and crying and then spicing up the proceedings by wafting above the three songs with his harmonica voicings. "It all started when I was playing the Gershwin tune from *Porgy and Bess*, which is one of the most intimate ballads I can think of," says Alan. "I was playing the vamp and thinking of tunes that are in the same key. That's how 'The Look of Love' came about and then how spontaneously that led to the Carole King riff. It surprised me what an interesting mix of tunes we came up with."

It's these kinds of surprises in the midst that make **Here's to Life** a special recording that steers clear of retreads and derivative game playing. Stacey and Alan take the very old and the new and make them into something unique and moving.

They both come from noteworthy musical backgrounds. Stacey has been recording in NYC studios since she was a kid and engaged in the music scene playing in a number of country, rock and even metal bands while also hanging in the jazz world. She has lent her voice to numerous commercials, TV and motion picture soundtracks over her 20+ year musical career. Originally from Cincinnati, Alan first studied with Benny Goodman's guitarist Cal Collins, then he honed his bebop chops in Chicago with guitarist and educator David Bloom. He moved to Washington, D.C. where his playing matured even further at the legendary Howard University Jazz program under the tutelage of two esteemed faculty members—drummer/vocalist Grady Tate (a thrill given that he had kept time with his guitar hero Wes Montgomery) and pianist Geri Allen (who taught him the rigors of arranging)—both of whom passed away last year. Over his 25-year career as a sideman, Alan has appeared with such artists as Anita Baker, Michael Feinstein and Wynton Marsalis.

While both took brief hiatuses and short sidetracks from the music world—kids and high-powered jobs to pay the bills—they have resurfaced in a big way with their new recording, which plain and simple, is a superb collection of heartfelt storytelling.

Dan Ouellette

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