

# VANESSA RACCI

Italians have been a force in jazz almost since the music was born. The backbone of the first recorded jazz group, the Original Dixieland Jass Band, was cornetist and trumpeter Dominick (Nick) LaRocca, the New Orleans-born son of Sicilian immigrants. In 1917, the members wrote “Tiger Rag,” a perfect crystallization of the freewheeling thrill of early jazz. Ever since then, Italy has given jazz one influential figure after another: Joe Venuti, Louis Prima, Morgana King, Lennie Tristano, Bucky Pizzarelli, Chick Corea, Stefano di Battista, and many more.

Jazz singer, **Vanessa Racci**, is an ambassador for that heritage. Vanessa grew up in Westchester County, New York amid an Italian-American family that steeped her in Italian song, theater music, and jazz. Vanessa developed a vocal style drawn from all three; it combines a tart, brassy, catch-in-the-throat sound with Italianate ardor, dramatic flair, and swing.

On her first album, ***Italiana Fresca***, released in 2017, she sang the Italian songs of her childhood in the language of jazz. One of her promotional stops was the Italian Heritage Festival in the New Orleans suburb of Kenner, Louisiana. It’s here she learned the rich history Italian Americans have with jazz. New Orleans from the 1880s onward had been a destination for Sicilian immigrants, who tended to be dark-skinned; consequently they met the same discrimination as blacks. Nonetheless, quite a few New Orleans-based Italians learned to play jazz from the local black musicians and shared bands with them.



On this second album, and her ZOHO debut, ***Jazzy Italian***, Vanessa revisits songs associated with many of the Italians and Italian-Americans who have left their mark on jazz. By her side are a pair of gifted and accomplished pianist/arrangers, **Steven Feifke** and **Glafkos Kontemeniotis**. Both men’s creative horn writing and harmonic and metric alterations bring even century-old songs into the present.

**At the Jazz Band Ball** is one of Nick LaRocca and the Original Dixieland Jass Band’s first set of compositions from 1917. Feifke’s arrangement alternates between traditional and modern; Vanessa’s slinky vocal intertwines with the bass trombone of Alex Jeun. The Oscar-winning standard **Moon River** was composed by another son of Italian immigrants, Enrico Nicola Mancini, better known as Henry Mancini. Vanessa sings Johnny Mercer’s lyric straightforwardly over Kontemeniotis’s updated voicings.

A bump-and-grind beat spices up **Coquette**, a 1928 Guy Lombardo hit, coauthored by his brother Carmen. The two men were born of an Italian couple who had immigrated to Canada. Clarinetist Leon Roppolo, of Sicilian descent, cowrote the 1923 smash, “Tin Roof Blues.” That tune formed the basis of Jo Stafford’s 1954 hit Make Love to Me, here given a Latin pulse. “I love the fact that it was kind of ahead of its time in promoting female sex appeal and power,” says Vanessa.

In 1951, at the lowest ebb of his career, Frank Sinatra recorded **I’m a Fool to Want You**, which he had helped write. He was madly in love with Ava Gardner, yet his wife Nancy would not grant him a divorce. Vanessa sets up her heated performance by reciting part of the bridge.

Guitarist John Pizzarelli wrote **A Lifetime or Two** with his wife, singer Jessica Molaskey. “It reminds me of my life with my husband,” explains Vanessa. She herself wrote **Come Back Home with Me** following a marital squabble that found him leaving her for a day. In this performance, Vanessa smilingly coaxes him back.

**You’re Everything** sprang from the first incarnation of the groundbreaking fusion band Return to Forever, founded by Armando “Chick” Corea. Percolating Latin piano and rhythms make Vanessa’s version far unlike the original. One of the lines, “When I’m with you I always sing,” reminds her of her husband, who had encouraged her to quit her corporate job and return to her true love, singing. This album is further proof of how right he was.

—James Gavin, New York City, 2022



# VANESSA RACCI

## JAZZY ITALIAN

Produced by Steven Feifke. Associate Producer: Jackie Presti. Arrangements: Steven Feifke, Glafkos Kontemeniotis. Instrumental tracks recorded at Trading 8s Studio May 14 & 15, 2022. Vocals recorded at Samurai Hotel Recording Studio June 6 – 30, 2022. Engineers: Chris Sulit, Tyler McDiarmid and David Stoller. Mixing, Mastering: David Darlington. Photography: Sara Pettinella, Little Comb Productions. Art direction and Package design: Al Gold. Executive Producer: Joachim "Jochen" Becker.

1. Betcha I Getcha: Giuseppe Venuti, Bix Beiderbecke 2:48
2. Volare: Domenico Modugno, Franco Migliacci, Dean Martin 3:48
3. At the Jazz Band Ball: Nick LaRocca, Larry Shields, Johnny Mercer 3:15
4. Moon River: Henry Mancini, Johnny Mercer 3:38
5. Coquette: Johnny Green, Carmen & Guy Lombardo, Gus Kahn 3:51
6. Make Love To Me: Bill Norvas, Alan Copeland, The New Orleans Rhythm Kings 3:56
7. I'm a Fool To Want You: Frank Sinatra, Jack Wolf, Joel Herron 3:17
8. A Lifetime Or Two: Jessica Molaskey, John Pizzarelli 3:13
9. A Sunday Kind of Love: Barbara Belle, Anita Leonard, Stan Rhodes, Louis Prima 4:04
10. Come Back Home With Me: Vanessa Racci 2:48
11. September in the Rain: Harry Warren, Al Dubin 3:34
12. You're Everything: Chick Corea 3:29
13. At Last: Mack Gordon, Harry Warren 5:36

Steven Feifke piano/arranger (2,3,5,7,8,10,11,12,13)

Glafkos Kontemeniotis piano/arranger (1,4,6,9)

Mark Lewandowski bass

Charles Goold drums

Sam Dillon saxophone, flute

Max Darche trumpet, flugelhorn

Alex Jeun trombone

Danny Conga Valdez congas

Artist: Vanessa Racci

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