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## Publicity & Marketing

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## **VOCALIST MELINDA ROSE & PIANIST FRENCHY ROMERO CELEBRATE A DOZEN YEARS OF MUSIC-MAKING WITH *I'M ON MY WAY***

**Coming July 19, 2024**

Over the last dozen years, vocalist **MELINDA ROSE** and pianist **FRENCHY ROMERO** have developed a strong friendship and a great musical collaboration. They grew up within blocks of each other in Miami, and at the time of their first meeting, they were sophomores at competing arts magnet high schools. While they never attended school together, both were attracted to the sounds of straight-ahead jazz. The two young apprentices met at a community jam session which was open to jazz musicians of all ages. They attended that jam session every week and their musical partnership began to bloom. Even when they moved to different cities to attend college, they would reunite every summer for rehearsals and gigs. When they were both attending graduate schools in Illinois, they landed a few engagements in Chicago. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Rose and Romero returned to Miami to teach and perform.

In 2022, Rose was invited to audition to be the first vocalist for the U.S. Army big band, called the Army Blues. After winning the position, she completed basic training and then moved to Washington, D.C. to join the band. About two months later, Rose saw an audition announcement for pianists in another band at the same base. She shared the news with Romero, who eventually won the job. After Romero finishes her basic training this autumn, Rose and Romero will be stationed together in D.C., and the Army has encouraged them to play duet engagements when not occupied with their respective service bands.

Rose and Romero's first collaborative recording, the self-released ***I'M ON MY WAY*** offers a sneak preview of their duo concerts. It is a stunning collection of standards and originals performed in duet, quartet and quintet settings. In addition to Rose's vocals and Romero's piano, the personnel includes bassist **VINCE DUPONT**, drummer **MATT WILSON**, and trumpeter **SUMMER CAMARGO**. For those trying to identify the two principals on the album's front cover, Romero wears glasses.

Rose's roots in Ella Fitzgerald and Anita O'Day can be heard in the album's opener, "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off," as she lightly swings the first chorus of the Gershwin tune, and then improvises with lyrics in the second go-round. Romero sprinkles ideas between Rose's phrases, and then lets loose with a rollicking solo with witty jumps between the high and low registers. The dialogue between voice and piano resumes after Dupont's fine bass chorus with the two women bouncing ideas to-and-fro. "Once Upon a Summertime" opens with a pensive extended piano introduction before moving into a seductive Latin beat. Although the original song was written in French, Rose sings the lyric in Spanish, an acknowledgement of the Hispanic heritage of both women. Romero follows with another impressive solo, and then supports Rose's swinging recapitulation, this time sung in English.

Stevie Wonder's "If It's Magic" is the basis for the first of the album's three vocal/piano duets. It displays the great sensitivity between these friends and musicians, with a flowing rubato pulse throughout, dramatic piano and soulful vocals. The duet continues with a skittery take on "It Could Happen to You." Voice and piano chase each other through the melody, before a strong 4/4 pulse is established in the keyboard as the scat solo begins. The two rhythmic approaches combine in the final chorus. The full group returns as they premiere the sultry Rose original, "Don't Come Back." Dupont provides the sole support for the first 16 bars as Rose delivers a defiant message to her ex-lover. The addition of piano and drums at the bridge adds weight before Camargo enters with a wailing plunger-muted solo. Romero quickens the pulse for her solo, and then the original tempo returns for a wild jam in the coda contrasting view of lost love appears in the next track—also composed by Rose—"I'd Do It All Again." Here, the narrator recognizes the small mistakes that marred the relationship and understands the lessons that hard times can bring. The trio arrangement brilliantly supports the dramatic scenario.

"In My Own Little Corner" is a forgotten gem from the 1957 Rodgers and Hammerstein TV musical, *Cinderella*. The Rose/Romero version is grittier than Julie Andrews' original interpretation, but the song's message about the wonders of free imagination remains intact. Wilson's danceable Latin beat, Camargo's warm open solo, Romero's improvisation in octaves, and Rose's wide-open optimism add to the fun. The Rose original "I'm On My Way" features Wilson's hand drum accompanying Rose's sunny vocal. Dupont clearly enjoys the chord sequence for his solo, and Romero's chorus starts with parallel octaves but quickly turns in a different direction. The solo voice of Rose opens the album's highlight, a touching duo version of Irving Berlin's "You Can Have Him." Drawing on the passion of Nancy Wilson's classic recording, Rose and Romero compress and intensify this powerful tale of commitment and attachment. The performance benefits from great dynamic contrasts and a wide emotional range. One further Rose original, "It's Not You, It's Me" closes the album with happy swing and a bittersweet lyric.

To paraphrase the words of Shakespeare, Melinda Rose and Frenchy Romero are "fortunately met." Their many hours of rehearsal and performance (together and apart) have yielded a splendid recording notable for its superb repertoire, outstanding emotional arc, and joyous performances. May this fine collaboration continue for many years.

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***I'M ON MY WAY*** will be released on July 19, 2024 and will be available at Bandcamp and on all streaming platforms.

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