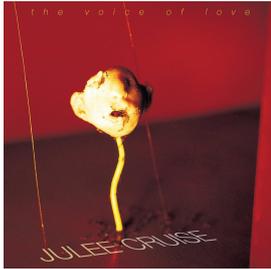


Brainwashed - Julee Cruise, "The Voice of Love"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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Newly reissued on Sacred Bones, *The Voice of Love* (1993) was Cruise's second and final album with the singular songwriting team of David Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti. I suspect it did not sell particularly well upon its release, as I found my copy in a cut-out bin and it was Cruise's final album for Warner Brothers, but it has since rightly attained the cult stature it deserves. It is admittedly a bit uneven compared with its more illustrious predecessor (1989's *Floating Into The Night*

), uncannily mirroring Lynch's own changing fortunes, as *Night*

featured music from

Blue Velvet

and

Twin Peaks

while

Voice

features pieces from

Wild at Heart

,

Fire Walk With Me

, and

Industrial Symphony No. 1

. Still, a significant amount of that initial magic lingered and continued to blossom, as

The Voice of Love

fitfully captures some of the finest work of Cruise's "ghostly chanteuse" phase. It may be an imperfect classic album, but it is a classic album nonetheless.

[Sacred Bones](#)

Without question, Julee Cruise has had one of the more strange and improbable careers in pop music, as she was the daughter of an Iowa dentist who studied French horn and performed in children's theater productions in Minnesota before she met Angelo Badalamenti (the two met after Cruise moved to NYC to pursue a career in musical theater). Around the same time, Lynch was unsuccessfully attempting to secure the rights for This Mortal Coil's "Song to the Siren" cover, leading to his suggestion that Badalamenti try to compose a similarly rapturous

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and dreamlike replacement. Badalamenti tagged in Cruise as a possible vocalist and she took to the role like a duck to water, launching a brief yet iconic career as a recurring and surreal presence in David Lynch's work. A malleable, Midwestern muse, if you will. That background is crucial in understanding both this album and the rest of Cruise's career, as *The Voice of Love* was not exactly Julee Cruise's vision—Lynch and Badalamenti were the primary architects and she was the actress talented and versatile enough to bring their shared vision believably to life. The wounded, somnambulant songbird of Cruise's Lynch albums is not the real Cruise. The *real*

Julee Cruise is the one who made Latin-tinged trip-hop albums, sang showtunes, and was a touring member of the B-52s. That is not meant to disparage her role in her own career, but to explain that

Floating Into The Night

and

The Voice of Love

are essentially David Lynch's hallucinatory vision of a pop diva made flesh and turned loose in the real world. As such, the weaker moments on

Voice

, such as the Enya-esque "Friends for Life," fall squarely on Lynch's shoulders, as Cruise was implored to "sing like an angel" over toothless, sleepy dream pop and she did exactly that.

The trio are at their best when they stick to the familiar territory of vaguely nightmarish and noir torch songs or hypnagogic re-imaginings of '60s girl-group pop innocence. In the latter realm, both the smoky, slow-motion reggae of "This Is Our Night" and the lushly sensual "Movin' In On You" stand as two of the album's most blarily gorgeous pieces. "Up In Flames" is another gem, as its walking bass line, sickly synths, and blurred siren wails approximate a sultry and seductive cabaret of the damned. More than any other song on the album, "Up In Flames" nails the haunted, twilight unreality of Lynch's best work. The rest of the album is often quite good as well, but it is an extremely precarious balancing act that lives or dies on the strength of Badalamenti's compositions. That is a fundamental peril with the trio's distinctive dream pop aesthetic: most of the heavy lifting is done by the underlying music, as Cruise is eternally relegated to being a floating and spectral presence. In the right context, her cooing vocals are sensuous and dreamily vaporous, but they can feel weightlessly pretty or just playfully kooky ("Kool Kat Walk") when she is not given substantial enough material to work with. Badalamenti tries to overcome that hurdle in some interesting ways over the course of the album, such as adding quasi-industrial percussion to "Until The End of The World" or twanging guitars and a smoky saxophone solo in "Space For Love." He finds the most success when he just subtly curdles his languorous, soft-focus idyll with passing dissonance, however, as he does with the murky synths and smeared, lingering decays in "She Would Die For Love."

Although it is not my favorite song on the album, "She Would Die For Love" is an especially illustrative example of Badalamenti and Lynch's otherworldly alchemical genius, as it uses the most non-threatening tools imaginable (jazzy piano chords, lyrical sax solos, and fretless bass

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noodling) to weave something improbably pregnant with simmering menace. Obviously, there are some excellent songs on both this album and *Floating Into The Night*, but the appeal of both albums arguably lies even more in the sustained atmosphere that the three artists create when their disparate yet complementary aesthetics combine.

The Voice of Love

is fascinating and distinctive precisely because it is such weird and singular juxtaposition that seems like it should not work: David Lynch's unabashed love of classic pop music collides with broodingly cinematic synths, noirish jazz, and a vocalist who elusively floats through it all like a sleepy ghost. Somehow, however, everything is necessary and it all fits together beautifully. Given their accomplished careers, it is deceptively easy to credit Lynch and Badalamenti as the driving forces behind Cruise's two great albums, as hazy, reverb-swathed female vocalists are hardly unique, but I sincerely doubt any other vocalist could have played her role so seamlessly and hauntingly. On

The Voice of Love

, Cruise shows herself to be a master stylist, elegantly and enigmatically blurring the lines between angel, lovesick diva, and seductive Siren.

Samples:

- [This Is Our Night](#)
- [Movin' In On You](#)
- [Up In Flames](#)