



Selia Qynn,
Charmed Existence
 (self-produced, 1999)

Initially scanning Selia Qynn's **Charmed Existence**, I noticed the nostalgic title font, the misty-eyed cover worthy of a paperback romance and finally the version of "Can't Help Falling in Love" among the songs. Warning bells started going off.

But when the first notes played, those bells faded, replaced by sultry vocals suitable for a smoky jazz club, along with a backdrop of saxophone, hand drums and flute. There's mystery here in these atmospherics, the mystery born in a relationship, when two people start out together on an unknown path.

This jazz flavor continues via Kelly Dean's saxophone, but it's also varied with folk leanings, including some fine cello work by Max Dyer. It's an interesting and well-constructed stylistic palette, well-suited to Qynn's intimate and nuanced voice, which is capable of both power and restraint. Qynn handles both lead and backing vocals, and displays a strong vocal gift with both.

Following a single relationship's arc, or perhaps those of several different relationships, the songs start in the mist of possibility and gradually shift to a concrete if lightheaded reality. Like a landmark midway along the road, "Seasons" makes this path clear with its image of passing months that lead to the eventual winter, thus foreshadowing a relationship's bleak end.

Despite this traditional story of a couple's affair, Qynn's beautiful voice and the accomplished musicians involved provide the variety and depth to keep the listener's interest. A passage of Spanish decorates "Royal Love," and "Miss You Like Crazy" unexpectedly becomes an amusing, bouncy '50s pop tune. Amid this playfulness, more serious songs like "Bitter Blue" maintain enough energy to avoid morose melodramatics.

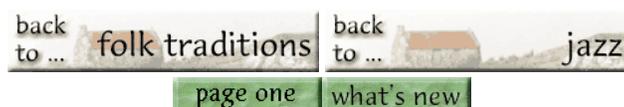
Not all of Qynn's songwriting is immortal prose. In fact, she pens some fairly facile lines. (One particular rhyme, "Soft sighs, warm thighs," makes me repeatedly wince.) Yet, many fine lyrics decorate the narrative like precious stones on a chain, among them the first track's epigram, which might well serve as the blueprint for the entire CD: "Fantasies are stories, illusions are not real / And tricks are never magic, but feelings always feel."

Fortunately, even the seemingly easy lyrics become more complex in context. Qynn declares "I want water" on "Desert Wind," only to shortly be "tortured in this storm" during "Winter Rain." Much of the early, daydreaming innocence becomes more deliberate when one realizes that Qynn already knows the unpleasant end of this story. Such stereotypes and clichés exist in part because they do succeed in expressing basic human feeling and experiences, even those that seem hopelessly naive in retrospect.

In the end, my early impression of **Charmed Existence** was not completely wrong. The romance here is dominant, and it is a little precious, a little stereotypical. But then, real romance is often these things too, a fact Qynn seems to well recognize. Enough delicate realizations appear here to counterbalance the certain familiarity, and the balance of light elements with darker ones makes each mood's relative truth all the more apparent.

Those seeking a measured look at relationships, one built on jazz flavor and strong vocals, one that's light but not insubstantial, will find **Charmed Existence** a rewarding choice.

[[by Ken Fasimpaur](#)]



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