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MELODY GARDOT

My One and Only Thrill
(Verve)

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Melody Gardot, an unflappable young singer-songwriter from Philadelphia, approaches the art of the love song warily. On her second album, *My One and Only Thrill*, she contemplates romance from any angle involving need. She has a knack for the melodramatic but also for a kind of minimalism: she knows the power of modest gestures and meaningful inflections.

The mist and shadows are all but visible in some of these songs, which Ms. Gardot performs either with a well-behaved jazz combo or a shimmering curtain of stings. (The orchestrations are by Vince Mendoza, an old hand at sensuous gallantry.) She sings smartly, resourcefully, moving around her smoky mid-register with a shuddering vibrato. Everything about her style is vintage, informed by American songbook singers and the heroines of French chanson.

Her carefulness keeps a ballad like *The Rain* from slipping into torpor, and her coolness helps carry a noirish tune like *Our Heart Is as Black as Night*. But Ms. Gardot and her producer, Larry Klein, decided to make even her optimistic songs - including the title track and one called *Our Love Is Easy* - feel weighty and lugubrious.

The chief exceptions to this rule both come aerated with bossa nova rhythm: *The Stars Were Mine*, a whimsical trifle, and *Over the Rainbow*, the album's lone cover. Ms. Gardot has the range for such digressions, as she's likely to prove at the City Winery on Tuesday night (and in a semi-secret midnight show afterward; find details through myspace.com/melody). In the meantime she deserves credit for creating an album this focused, even at the cost of vigor. - NATE CHINEN