

Hello! We see your preferred language is English (United States), would you like to stay on [English \(United Kingdom\)](#) or switch to [English \(United States\)](#)?



[Sign in](#)

- [Sign in](#)
- [Create an Account](#)

[New York, NY](#)

Change Location

[Browse All Cities](#)

Welcome

Life lived live!

Trending Topics:

- [Beyonce](#)
- [Coldplay](#)
- [Taylor Swift](#)
- [Music](#)
- [festivals](#)
- [AXS Buzz](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [rock](#)
- [pop](#)
- [National](#)
- [Latin](#)
- [Los Angeles](#)
- [new york](#)
- [bay area](#)
- [Labor Day](#)

- 
- 
- 
- 

# Kelley Sutenfield vocalizes through Tony Romano's heartstrings



By: [Carol Banks Weber](#) AXS Contributor Aug 27, 2014 2 hours ago  
1649416 473976 16541761 7 y2014m08d27



Kelley Sutenfield

All you need to know before playing [Kelley Sutenfield](#)'s new album *Among The Stars*, with her guitarist [Tony Romano](#), is she's laying herself as bare as can be in every carefully chosen cover. There are 10 unlikely covers to choose from, only one or two are considered typical jazz standards. None of that matters. Throw away any jazz cover preconceptions.

This East Coast-based jazz vocalist approaches the songs that mean the world to her differently than anyone else. She literally breathes her own loving, sensitive, and reverent persona into every lyrical syllable in her own spacious time. Most singers would run screaming from the studio without the crutch of a full band, lots of overdubs, and that ever-virulent auto-tune.

Sutenfield didn't approach the recording without some trepidation. She knew she would have to expose her voice with only an acoustic guitar accompaniment, ready or not.

"There is nowhere to hide in a setting like this with both instruments and players fully revealed," she admitted in an [August 19th, AXS interview](#). "In order to get into the proper head space in the studio, I had to be confident in my musical choices, even in moments when I didn't feel it, for the greater good of the project. That requires a certain amount of maturity and growth as an artist, and also a human being."

Fans who've followed Sutenfield know she could belt these [numbers](#) without thinking twice. She's got the vocal chops for it. She proved as much in her debut album, *Where Is Love?*, which she recorded with a full band, grazing several styles under a jazz foundation. But her design here with the vocal-guitar format was to tone the volume down and present a softer delivery in what she termed adult lullabies.

"With only two players, each instrument is fully exposed, and the slightest flaw becomes magnified 20-30 times over. To counteract this effect, the delivery needs to be understated and subtle. The arrangements are scaled back and spacious, a moment of silence becomes a third instrument, and the vocal placement at times is almost a whisper in the ear."

Scheduled for a September 30th release, *Among The Stars* transcends the pleasing ear-feel of intimate arrangements by two artists who cover each other very well from those two years gigging at a Manhattan wine bar (the launch for this second CD). Sattenfield's vocals and Romano's exquisite instrumental shadow also manage to cover vast emotional territory in the listener.

Their personal effect is that of bandaging up invisible wounds, piece by piece. She does this in the way she slows down the original pace of the covers, then slowly ruminates over words that previous singers may have overlooked for the money shots. There are times in this album when it feels as if she's trying to comfort a loved one with the only tools at her disposal, her words in a lyrical bond — the equivalent of a musical hug. Anna Nalick and Sara Bareilles do this all the time.

She's most effective in the opening song, Bart Howard's jazz standard, "Fly Me To The Moon," which she did in one take, Rodgers & Hammerstein's "People Will Say We're In Love," k.d. lang's "Wash Me Clean," Neil Young's "Harvest Moon," Gerald Goffin/Carole King's "One Fine Day," and oddly enough, the forgotten simplicity of a quietly hopeful anthem in "Try Your Wings" made famous by Blossom Dearie, and written by Michael Preston Barr and Dion McGregor.

These are the songs Sattenfield embraces most lyrically in a gentle, graceful hold over the words that appeal to her, for you, and underscored in just as gentle a manner as possible by Romano's guitar notes, plucked thoughtfully but not ostentatiously.

As she hovers over a melody's predictable rise and fall, she unexpectedly lingers around certain notes as they move her in the moment, revealing stark perspective. Her version of "Try Your Wings" is almost sung in a softly spoken encouragement. "Even the tiniest bluebird, Has to leave its nest to fly, What a bluebird can do, You can do too, if you try, If you've always had a dream, But you've been afraid that it would not come true, hitherto." Nobody knows what "hitherto" means, either, but they feel it as, "It's okay, I love you, you will soar, don't give up," in Sattenfield's tentative but forgiving, smoothed-over tones that can make one bizarre, throwback word last a lifetime.

She almost sings these words as if she's tenderly straightening out the rips and tears, ruffles and buckles of a friend's broken heart, as she pulls the covers of a warm quilt over to tuck all her love in. Nobody coaxes more comfort and safety in the earnest tone and humble lilt of "tiniest bluebird" than she does.

And she does this on almost every single song. "Harvest Moon" is another song altogether, a mixture of the fragile feminine and probing, affirming matter. She floats on the sonic compound of Romano's fluttering, flickering, phantasm voicing, catching stars.

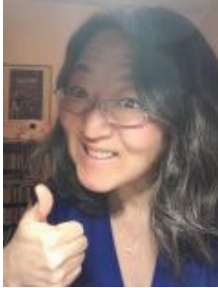
The Chiffons turned Carole King's "One Fine Day" into finger-snapping, bubblegum pop. Sattenfield and Romano go much deeper if that's possible. They reverse that clichéd trajectory back into a ballad within their intimate, acoustic sphere, by turning down the daylight in the bouncy, puff piece, to bring on the night with all its meandering, ambient embers — played to every strength by Romano.

Sattenfield goes farther. She flips the silver platter destiny of an assured, shallow love into a hard-fought certainty, applying counter measures on a downturn, subtly increasing the rooting value. It's the difference between a mindless cheerleader knowing she's gonna get the guy by flashing her superficial virtues at him, versus an underdog suffering way too much but reaching out in a last-ditch effort for a dramatic, scene-stealing climax.

Sattenfield's good at changing the vibe of a room by charging the eons with serious stakes. She's not playing the melody as written. She's going against the tide of the melody, weighting the lyrics with a layered depth — the equivalent of singing without a net. By going against the melody as written, she must tell another story entirely, a harder story to sell, filled with the intricacies of context and tangled history.

Sутtenfield makes up her own harmonious, counter melodies in "People Will Say We're In Love," breaking up the lyrics, down-tempoing the uptempo, uplifting odd-metered words, while Romano rides alongside her amiably, occasionally floating in a Latin detour. The result in a Jobim-inspired cover of a Broadway hit.

Is Kelley Sутtenfield pitch-perfect on this album? No. But she's heartfelt. There's gold in her well-meaning intent. And that means everything.



By: [Carol Banks Weber](#) AXS Contributor  
Aug 27, 2014 Added 2 hours ago  
Sponsor



### Share This:

<http://www.axs.com/kelle>

- 
- 
- 
- 

In this article

Topics:

[National jazz](#) [Kelley Sутtenfield](#) [new jazz album review](#) [Tony Romano](#)

Related Articles