

= Blue Gardenia (album) =

Blue Gardenia is a 2001 album by Etta James , released through the record label Private Music . It was produced by John Snyder , who had worked with James on five of her previous studio albums . Blue Gardenia contains thirteen jazz standards from the 1930s , 1940s and 1950s . All of the standards were arranged by pianist Cedar Walton , with the exception of " Love Letters " , which was arranged by Josh Sklair . Between November 2000 and February 2001 , Snyder and Walton assembled musicians to record tracks while James was recovering from a flu ; her vocals were added following her recovery . In addition to Walton , artists appearing on the album included Red Holloway on tenor saxophone and Dorothy Hawkins , James ' mother , who provided vocals on the title track . Hawkins died in May 2002 , less than a year after the album 's release .

James promoted the album by touring throughout the United States leading up to and following its release . Critical reception of the album was positive overall . The album reached number one on Billboard 's Top Jazz Albums chart .

= = Composition = =

Blue Gardenia contains thirteen jazz standards from the 1930s , 1940s and 1950s arranged by pianist Cedar Walton , with the exception of " Love Letters " , which was arranged by Josh Sklair . The album was produced by John Snyder , who had produced five of James ' past studio albums : The Right Time (1992) , Mystery Lady : Songs of Billie Holiday (1994) , Time After Time (1995) , 12 Songs of Christmas (1998) and Heart of a Woman (1999) . Between November 2000 and February 2001 , Snyder and Walton assembled a group of jazz musicians to record tracks for the album in the absence of James , who was suffering from the flu . A few months later , James recorded vocals following her recovery . AllMusic 's Jonathan Widran described the album as having an " old school big band flavor " with a " bed of simmering brass " ; instrumentation included bass , flugelhorn , guitar , piano , percussion , tenor saxophone , trombone and trumpet .

The album opens with a rendition of Clyde Otis ' " This Bitter Earth " , a song popularized by Dinah Washington and later added to Aretha Franklin 's repertoire , followed by " He 's Funny That Way " (Neil Moret , Richard A. Whiting) . Both tracks include improvisations by Walton on piano . According to Dorothy Hill , blues editor for Jazz Now , listeners can hear James " murmuring admiration " for Walton 's piano work in the background of " He 's Funny That Way " . " In My Solitude " , originally by Duke Ellington , features a " passionate " interlude by Red Holloway on tenor saxophone . Other standards appearing on the album include " There Is No Greater Love " (Isham Jones , Marty Symes) , Joe Greene 's " Don 't Let the Sun Catch You Crying " , and " Love Letters " , originally written by Edward Heyman and Victor Young . Sklair arranged the latter song and performed on guitar ; also featured is Rick Baptist on flugelhorn . " These Foolish Things " , originally written by Harry Link , Holt Marvell and Jack Strachey , previously appeared on James ' 1995 album of the same name . Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer 's " Come Rain or Come Shine " is followed by " Don 't Worry ' bout Me " (Rube Bloom , Ted Koehler) . Leading up to the album 's close are Arthur Hamilton 's " Cry Me a River " , " Don 't Blame Me " (Dorothy Fields , Jimmy McHugh) , and " My Man " which features a trombone solo by George Bohannon . The album 's closing and title track features vocals by James ' mother , Dorothy Hawkins .

= = Reception = =

Critical reception of Blue Gardenia was positive overall . Jonathan Widran wrote a positive review for the album , complimenting Walton 's arrangements and the featured soloists . Widran also said that each track allowed James to " explore both tenderness and guttural emotions " and that James ' mother 's contributions to the title track provided a " unique touch that [added] emotional dimension to an already emotionally rich affair " . Music critic Robert Christgau awarded the album an " A ? " rating and wrote that James " [lets] the songs do the talking and [leaves] you to wonder whether her modest melodic variations bespeak sly musicality or weathered pipes . " Isaac Guzman of the

New York Daily News thought that the album showcased James ' ability to " get inside the gentle nuances of classic torch songs and ballads " . Dorothy Hill noted the blues sound of the album and the " ache " in James ' voice . She complimented the performances by the guest musicians appearing on the album , including Hawkins , whose vocal contribution Hill called " unpolished but alluring " .

Billboard 's Bill Holland called James and the material on Blue Gardenia a " near @-@ perfect fit " after noting her " hit @-@ or @-@ miss relationship with standards " in the past . Holland felt that Walton 's arrangements were designed for a singer with a " less robust style " , but considered " Blue Gardenia " and " Cry Me a River " to be " riveting " . Lorraine Ali 's review for Newsweek called Blue Gardenia a " smooth cocktail " , suggesting that James ' vocal performance reflected her difficult past . Dave Nathan of All About Jazz concluded that " James may have slowed a bit when it comes to technical skills . But the fervency , the soul and the passion not only are still there , but have grown keener with age . This is an album of more than an hour of from the heart singing by one of the great ones and is recommended . "

= = Track listing = =

" This Bitter Earth " (Clyde Otis) ? 4 : 20

" He 's Funny That Way " (Neil Moret , Richard A. Whiting) ? 6 : 00

" In My Solitude " (Eddie DeLange , Duke Ellington , Irving Mills) ? 5 : 16

" There Is No Greater Love " (Isham Jones , Marty Symes) ? 5 : 18

" Don 't Let the Sun Catch You Crying " (Joe Greene) ? 5 : 18

" Love Letters " (Edward Heyman , Victor Young) ? 3 : 59

" These Foolish Things " (Harry Link , Holt Marvell , Jack Strachey) ? 5 : 14

" Come Rain or Come Shine " (Harold Arlen , Johnny Mercer) ? 5 : 39

" Don 't Worry ' bout Me " (Rube Bloom , Ted Koehler) ? 5 : 52

" Cry Me a River " (Arthur Hamilton) ? 5 : 02

" Don 't Blame Me " (Dorothy Fields , Jimmy McHugh) ? 5 : 01

" My Man " (Channing Pollack , Yvain @-@ Albert , Maurice Yvain) ? 5 : 09

" Blue Gardenia " (Lester Lee , Bob Russell) ? 5 : 07

Track listing adapted from AllMusic .

= = Personnel = =

Credits adapted from AllMusic .

= = Charts = =

Blue Gardenia reached number one on Billboard 's Top Jazz Albums chart and held the position for at least four weeks . This was James ' first number one position on any Billboard chart ; previously , Mystery Lady : Songs of Billie Holiday (1994) and Matriarch of the Blues (2000) had reached number two on the Top Jazz Albums and Top Blues Albums charts , respectively . The June 8 , 2002 , issue of Billboard , which featured year @-@ to @-@ date rankings as part of the publication 's " Jazz Spotlight " , included Blue Gardenia at number six on the Top Jazz Albums chart .