

# All About Jazz

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## Vincent Poag - Circling Back (2011)

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are needed to see this picture.

He sings something like Bob Dylan, plays guitar something like Mark Knopfler, but doesn't fall into easy mimicry of either. Credit a long journey to get here, as Vincent Poag took some time away from his dream of becoming a singer-songwriter for the straight life and starting a family.

Now older, wiser and possessing a complexity often lacking in such things, Poag has completed a long-awaited recording in *Circling Back* (Danal) that seeks to frame up his own life lessons. The music mirrors that depth, moving beyond the expected coffee-house acoustics to include orchestral flourishes from the cello, violin and French horn.

Along the way, this New York-based folkie digs deep into the quiet, lasting worries of growing up, of growing old, of trying to make it. "Fence Around Your Mind" laments the way experience can turn against us, smoothing the path toward complacency. "Lawless Lady," with a guest vocal by Diana Hope, explores the ugly circumstances that can turn us toward bad choices. "I'll Be Seeing You Soon," this album's most overt rocker, seems to find Poag spent from the effort, as he laments the "bullsh-t flyin' everywhere."

Yet Poag—who boasts a voice that bears the deep emotional scars of Tom Waits, and the half-lit urgency of Leonard Cohen—is perhaps most memorable, really, when he lets loose this biting, Randy Newman-esque humor on fun asides like "Eat My Shorts" or

“What's the Matter with You.” Then there's “Stress,” with its twinkling island rhythm and what-me-worry? delivery.

Just when Poag threatens to get too far down one of existence's dimly lit alleys, he'll pause for a boozy celebration of life like “Little One,” aware as always of the dangers—but certain, even now it seems, that things can work out: “Persevere with a dream,” Poag sings, “for a dream to come through.”

This album is as good a proof as any that they do just that.