

MARY D'ORAZI

Biography

Mary D'Orazi isn't the first jazz singer beguiled by the luscious melodies and intoxicating rhythms of Brazil, but few have followed their passion to musical destinations as beautiful and interesting. Possessing a crystalline tone and supple rhythmic feel, D'Orazi worked closely with pianist/arranger and producer Marcos Silva and some of the Bay Area's best musicians to craft her impressive debut album ***To Brasil and Bacharach - A Tribute***.

A supremely sophisticated pianist and accompanist with vast knowledge of the Brazilian songbook's back pages, Silva introduced D'Orazi to songs far beyond the usual bossa nova and MPB hits (though they interpret Jobim's eternal "Fotografia"). The album opens with "Chico Hipocondria," an obscure, jazzy gem by Aécio Flávio, a Brazilian pop artist who's largely unknown in North America. A second Flávio tune, "Coração Vira Lata," suggests there might be much more gold to be mined from this songwriter's recordings. Lush and lithe, the melody sounds like Steely Dan's Walter Becker and Donald Fagen losing their LA paranoia in Rio, complete with a winsome alto sax solo by Harvey Wainapel, a true Brazilian music devotee.

From the pen of the brilliant guitarist Toninho Horta, a musician with whom Silva has deep ties, D'Orazi artfully navigates "Meu Canario Vizinho Azul," a lovely song that recalls Horta's essential role in Milton Nascimento's *Clube da Esquina* in Belo Horizonte. Colin Hogan's accordion introduces Ivan Lins and Vitor Martins' "Vieste," a gorgeous soaring melody that stands out even amidst this exceptional company. And Silva's own "Barra-Joá," which features a sparkling wordless vocal by D'Orazi, serves as a compelling reminder that a new album focusing on the pianist's originals is well overdue.

While it's no surprise to find an American jazz singer delving into Brazilian music, D'Orazi and Silva weave a much more complex tapestry here, alternating the songs in Portuguese with Bacharach/David hits filtered through a Brazilian lens. "I've always loved Burt's music," D'Orazi says. "It's so beautiful and appealing and well written. At one point I had gotten a gig and I said to Marcos, 'What about doing some arrangements of Burt Bacharach songs?' He was very excited to try

them out.”

Bacharach famously drew on bossa nova in his music, but the arrangements often foreground a latent Brazilian pulse, drawing out what Silva calls “the Brazilian DNA” in these songs. “I Say a Little Prayer” ascends heavenward on Silva’s scintillating piano solo, while “A House Is Not a Home” aches with that untranslatable bittersweet Brazilian emotion *saudade*. In the same way, D’Orazi’s version of “Alfie,” a song that’s often given a light and breezy treatment, digs into David’s searching lyric (and like “A House” features beautifully calibrated violin work by Hande Erdem). The album closes with a dreamy version of “(They Long To Be) Close To You,” a sensuous vibe heightened by Erik Jekabson’s caressing flugelhorn.

One reason that the album works so well is that D’Orazi and Silva recruited a stellar cast of musicians for the project. Electric bassist Scotty Thompson and drummer Phil Thompson (no relation) have more than a decade of experience together as a superlative rhythm section tandem. Together they’ve worked with many of Brazil’s greatest musicians, including Chico Pinheiro, Toninho Horta, Leny Andrade, and Jovino Santos Neto. Ace jazz drummer Greg German, D’Orazi’s husband, holds down the drum chair on about half the tracks.

It’s impossible to overstate Silva’s role on the Bay Area music scene. He’s introduced several generations of players to Brazilian music. He came up as a teenager in the midst of Rio’s second wave of bossa nova, and he’s served as music director, arranger, and keyboardist for Flora Purim and Airtó, Toninho Horta, Paquito D’Rivera, Bud Shank, Ricardo Silveira, Edu Lobo, and numerous Caymmi siblings (namely Dori, Nana, and Danilo). Like so many musicians before her, D’Orazi describes meeting Silva as a musical epiphany “that changed my world,” she says.

As a child she fell in love with the songs on the hit album *Sérgio Mendes & Brazil* ‘66, but it wasn’t until decades later when she was attending Jazz Camp West that she decided to study Brazilian music after meeting Silva, who was on faculty. “I took some classes with him at the Jazzschool when it was above La Note Café,” D’Orazi says, referring to the institution now accredited as the California Jazz Conservatory (where Silva is head of the Brazilian music program). “The intricacies, the melodies and harmonic complexities just hooked me.”

Growing up in a musical household with Italian immigrant parents, D’Orazi watched her father writing songs throughout her childhood. A doctor by day, he spent his free time composing on the ukulele at night. She took eight years of piano lessons and sang in various choirs throughout her adolescence, but by the time she enrolled in college her musical pursuits had fallen by the wayside. Eventually her long suppressed desire to sing bubbled up when a friend asked her what she most wanted to do with her life. “I answered, ‘Be a singer,’ which kind of shocked me,” she says. In her mid-30s she started taking private voice lessons.

Always interested in jazz, she found her niche when she joined the Oakland Jazz Choir under the direction of Greg Murai. “Greg brought a lot of energy and excitement to the choir,” D’Orazi recalls. “And I met a lot of musicians. This was a jumping off place for me, a jolt into a new life. I was kind of hiding in the back at first, but I ended up doing some solos out front, and eventually realized it was time to move on and focus on solo work.”

She started gigging widely around the Bay Area, and formed an early alliance with guitarist Terrence Brewer, with whom she recorded the duo CD *Where There Is Love* (under the name Mary Freeberg). But it was her creatively charged relationship with Marcos Silva that set her on her present course. While she still considers herself a student of jazz and Brazilian music, D’Orazi grew from dedicated student to musical colleague, performing at major concerts series and venues around Northern California with Silva. **With *To Brasil and Bacharach - A Tribute* D’Orazi leaves no doubt that she’s a formidable artist in her own right who has honed a body of songs unlike anyone else on the scene.**

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