



LUCIANA SOUZA with PAUL SIMON

New York Magazine

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One Man's Ceiling Is Another Man's Floor

Paul Simon's tribute at BAM was a triumph. So why'd he look so glum?

By Justin Davidson

The Brooklyn Academy of Music's three-part, month long festival of Paul Simon's music was a crushing rejoinder to those who would itemize the duds in his catalogue and hold them against him. Simon has written indispensable songs by the cartload; he has chiseled, enameled, and assembled them into intricate mosaics; and he executes them with one of the tightest bands in popular music, captained by the astonishingly versatile guitarist-cellist-saxophonist-everythingist Mark Stewart. The BAM concerts made plain the mutual generosity of Simon's collaborations: He collects a community of superb musicians who nourish and excite each other. **The phenomenal Brazilian singer Luciana Souza channeled Simon without imitating him, letting her voice burble over syllables and stretch sensuously across his winding melodies. I could have spent the whole night listening to her enunciate the syllables "Can't run but," which she made at once liquid and percussive.** David Byrne chopped up "I Know What I Know" and "You Can Call Me Al" with his manic staccato, revealing the extent to which he and Simon share a surreal X-ray vision of America.

In the program titled "Under African Skies," Simon proudly laid out his collection of exotic influences—Amazonian cross-rhythms, Caribbean dances, the insistent lilt of West African guitar playing, the iridescent harmonies of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and the cloud of cotton-candy doo-wop that drifts like a childhood memory through his songs. The chirpy sound of the fifties acts as shorthand for wistfulness, loneliness, and loss. Anyone can scavenge from the world's library of styles; Simon forges his enthusiasms into a powerful personality and wraps weighty lyrics in buoyant music.

It's possible that he is less than thrilled with being venerable. On the first night of "American Tunes," the final part of the tribute trilogy, he stayed mostly in the wings. Now and then he stumped onstage with all the enthusiasm of a postal clerk on tax day to sing tunes that must seem antediluvian even to him. Maybe the gloomy electronic rumble in the version of "Graceland" by the Brooklyn band Grizzly Bear depressed him, or Josh Groban's cruise-ship-entertainer's take on "America." Or perhaps he just had a cold. Things finally picked up toward the end, when he got around to more recent material. "How Can You Live in the Northeast?" (from his 2006 album *Surprise*) is a dejected expression of how hard it is to live in a fragmented world, but with its layers of grinding and sparkling guitars, it's also an argument for Simon's own perfectionism, a statement that in a hopeless and vulgar age, craftsmanship and care still count.

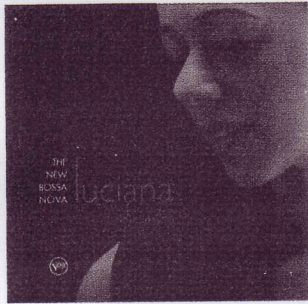


Reviews

Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

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Luciana Souza

The New Bossa Nova

VERVE 945602

★★★

One night in San Francisco, after delivering a program in Portuguese with his band, the great Brazilian singer-songwriter Caetano Veloso sat down on a stool and, accompanying

himself sparsely on guitar, sang, in English, the 1934 standard “Stars Fell On Alabama.” Suddenly, it became obvious that the metaphorical landscapes and poetic nuances we think of as special to Brazilian song lyrics also turn up in many North American popular songs. That’s not to diminish a great Brazilian tradition, but to set the stage for Luciana Souza’s extraordinarily original—although not completely successful—new hybrid album.

Souza and producer Larry Klein (whom she recently married), have selected highly literate songs from the second Great American Songbook (mostly from the 1960s and ’70s), and cast them in a bossa nova mood. How? First they found English-language songs of fate, lament and loss—like Joni Mitchell’s “Down To You,” James Taylor’s “Never Die Young” (on which Taylor harmonizes nicely with Souza) and Randy Newman’s “Living Without You”—as well as songs of extravagant sentiment, like Sting’s “When We Dance” and Brian Wilson’s “God Only Knows.”

They set these songs over the gently pulsing guitar of longtime Souza collaborator Romero Lubambo, with the lyrical solos of saxophonist Chris Potter weaving through the mix and the dreamy chords of pianist Edward Simon hovering on top or running beneath. The resulting sonic impressionist painting isn’t exactly bossa nova and isn’t exactly American pop. Its gauzy yet brilliant colors bleed in and out of one another and Souza—who has one of the most flat-out gorgeous voices in jazz—delivers the story line. Pure, plain and pitch-perfect, Souza swoops down on Sting’s line, “When we dance, angels will run and hide their wings,” and a shiver goes through the room; her restraint on “Living Without You” makes it all that much more felt.

Some of the material, though, such as Leonard Cohen’s “Here It Is,” is harmonically and melodically dull, and not a great fit for bossa nova. (Interestingly, one of the most appealing melodies comes on the Klein and Souza original “You And The Girl”). It’s also a little weird that Souza phrases “Down To You” almost exactly like Klein’s ex-wife, Mitchell. But that’s a minor problem. For all its originality, the album bogs down with too many slow and similar tempos, a dynamic sameness and a sense of being too controlled—a pity, because there are some terrific cuts.

—Paul de Barros

The New Bossa Nova: Down To You; Never Die Young; Here It Is; When We Dance; Satellite; Were You Blind That Day; Love Is For Strangers; You And The Girl; Living Without You; I Can Let Go Now; God Only Knows; Waters Of March. (56:19)

Personnel: Luciana Souza, James Taylor (2), vocals; Chris Potter, tenor saxophone; Romero Lubambo, guitar, cavaquinho; Scott Colley, bass; Antonio Sanchez, drums, percussion; Edward Simon, piano, keyboards; Matt Moran, vibraphone (1, 6–8).

» Ordering info: vervemusicgroup.com





BOSTON HERALD

Brazilian singer Souza is the Bossa of American pop

Tuesday, August 21, 2007

Luciana Souza felt fairly confident that she was onto something unique with her new CD of bossa nova-ized covers of American pop songs.

James Taylor, who sings a duet with Souza on his "Never Die Young," erased any doubts that the Brazilian-born singer may have had.

"We overdubbed the track together," Souza said from New York, "and James came in to hear it and said, 'Wow, this works!' (The original song) could have been a bossa!"

The way Souza does them on her "The New Bossa Nova" CD, Steely Dan's "Were You Blind That Day," Sting's "When We Dance," the Beach Boys' "God Only Knows" and Joni Mitchell's "Down to You" could have been, too.

"These songs were already great the way Joni or James had done them," the three-time Grammy nominee said. "I just think there's something neat about presenting them this way."

Souza, who lived in Boston for many years while a student at Berklee College of Music and New England Conservatory and then as a teacher at Berklee, is known for her adventurous jazz-meets-Brazilian style. Thursday at the Regattabar she plans to mix it up like she always does live, meaning you're as likely to hear music by Brazilian superstars Milton Nascimento or Gilberto Gil as you are Leonard Cohen and Randy Newman.

Souza says she danced to the music of the Police as a young girl in Sao Paulo. Her parents, Walter Santos and Tereza Souza, composers who were part of Brazil's original bossa nova movement, were also fans of American pop.

"When I was growing up I listened to a lot of American music," Souza said. "I've always wanted to do a record of the music I grew up singing that wasn't Brazilian. But I didn't know how to make this record."

Enter Souza's husband, Larry Klein, a producer and jazz bassist who had previously produced several albums for his ex-wife, Joni Mitchell.

"We had a list of 60 songs when we started," Souza said. "Many did not work. Larry had me play every song on the guitar myself to keep it really simple and bare. If the music survived me, it was OK."

While Souza acknowledges that her new label, Verve, loved the concept of the CD, "they really left us alone."

"People know me by now," she said. "I just turned 41. When you sign a 40-year-old who does a lot of avant-garde, weird stuff, and poetry, you know what you're getting. This is the exactly the record I wanted to do."

And likely, the Souza CD with the most commercial potential to date. While her work with big-band leader Maria Schneider and contemporary classical composer Osvaldo Golijov has drawn critical raves, Souza doesn't sell CDs like Diana Krall and Jane Monheit. "The New Bossa Nova" might change that.

"I always hope there will be commercial interest in my albums," she said. "To outside people, this record feels like I'm doing something different. Some people may call it premeditated. To me, it really isn't any different than anything I've done before. I've been singing about love forever, but just not singing about it this way."



HOUSTON CHRONICLE

March 12, 2007

SOUZA, LAGQ OFFER LIVELY ALBUM PREVIEW

The Los Angeles Guitar Quartet and Brazilian singer Luciana Souza will enter the studio this week to begin recording their first album together. But an enthusiastic DaCamera audience heard a rollicking preview of their multicultural, multigenre music Friday night at the Wortham Theater Center.

The Grammy Award-winning quartet and the two-time Grammy nominee Souza played an eclectic program that included Brazilian bossa nova, Spanish flamenco dances, an Argentinean aria, and a setting of one of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda's love sonnets.

Souza and the LAGQ, as they're known, demonstrated the same creativity in their performance that they did in selecting the program. Souza chatted up the friendly crowd between numbers and joined in the music-making fun by accompanying herself on the mbira, a hand-held African instrument, in her performance of Neruda's sonnet.

For their part, the LAGQ — John Dearman, William Kanengiser, Matthew Greif, Scott Tennant — relaxed their somewhat fussy manner for Souza. They beat rhythms on their guitars, bantered with Souza, and throughout proved their technical brilliance as an ensemble. At one point, a LAGQ member referred to the group as a quartet, then corrected himself: "A quintet." On Friday night, these five remarkable musicians played as a quintet.

The program began with *De Sábado Prá Dominginhos*, a light, jazzy groove by composer Hermeto Pascoal, known as the Frank Zappa of Brazil. The piece sounded like it was written for Saturday afternoon at the park instead of Friday night at a concert hall, but much of its democratic, carefree spirit survived the transition. Other highlights included *Triste*, an improvised bossa nova duet between Souza and Greif; *Lúa Descolorida*, a voluptuous aria by well-known contemporary composer Osvaldo Golijov; and a medley of songs with the distinctively Brazilian baião rhythm, arranged for voice and guitar by Souza herself. The performance ended with two pieces created especially for Souza and the LAGQ, *Sambadalú* and *Jobim Medley*, both of which will appear on their inaugural recording.

The program, which felt shorter than it was, only dragged during the few numbers that didn't include Souza's extraordinary voice and presence. Alone, the LAGQ is unassailably brilliant. They can make the guitar sound like the oldest instrument in the world or the newest, and their music can be baroque, classical, romantic and modern — often in the same piece. Nevertheless, a listener can't help thinking they'd be perfect for one of National Public Radio's "bumps" — the 15-second musical interludes between news stories that always feature safe, easy-listening, middlebrow musicians.

But under Souza's influence, the rarefied quartet comes back to earth and joins the party. At its best, the five combine the energy of a rock band with the chops of classically trained musicians, with sometimes breathtaking results.

But the real star of the show was Souza's voice. Silky, sensual, confident, occasionally fragile without ever threatening to break, its tremolos and melismas reminded one of water flowing smoothly over even the largest rocks.

As it navigated the program's wide, slow-moving straights, its turbulent rapids and its thundering cascades, Souza's voice never seemed to wobble. It was a wonder in a program of wonders.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Souza makes exquisite music of Pablo Neruda's poetry

Wednesday, February 14, 2007

By Matt Steel

Lyric poetry is a music of language that involves word sounds, their sequences, syntax, rhythmical articulation, and inflection when recited. The best of this poetry, such as that by the Nobel Prize-winning Chilean laureate Pablo Neruda (1904-73), is a veritable symphony. There is no need to subject it to the music of voice and instruments, a music that must satisfy its own rules, unless that music forms a mutually advantageous partnership with the words.

This is what thrice-Grammy-nominated Brazilian composer-singer Luciana Souza set out to prove in her Fontana Chamber Arts concert on Tuesday night. The equal roles of words and music were aptly reflected in the program title, "Luciana Souza Duo: Neruda." Together with pianist Edward Simon, she presented 11 of Neruda's poems set to her music and recitation.

In stark contrast to the snowstorm raging outside the Wellspring Theatre, the program began with recorded sounds of a thunderstorm. This was to set the scene of the rainy winters that Neruda would have experienced in Chile. It was fitting as a backdrop to the largely introspective poetry in which Neruda ponders nature, love and the human condition.

Souza appeared simply dressed, a small woman made even smaller as she performed barefooted. Her voice is clear, light, modest in range and virtually without vibrato. She achieved expression through dynamics, exceptional use of microphones, and interesting tonal and metric variety in her melodies. Her pure sound and careful setting of the words seemed a perfect marriage with Neruda's poetry. There is a comparison to be made here with the voice and singing style of Joni Mitchell, who Souza admits has had a strong influence on her.

Simon provided preludes, interludes and accompaniment to most of the settings. He also played piano works of Catalan composer Federico Mompou (1893-1987) which were inserted from time to time for their simple Satie-like mood. Simon's interludes were primarily jazz-conceived, cleverly improvised melody over sparse chords. His use of restrained dynamics and light textures fit perfectly with Souza's voice and the mood of the poetry. Any attempt to do more would have upset the delicate balance between the words and the music, drawing focus on the music for its own sake.

Souza also played instruments on a few songs. In "Sonnet 49," she sang and played an African thumb-piano throughout. For "House," she sat on a wooden box and beat out a bossa nova rhythm on it using a padded mallet and drummer's wire brush. In "I Will Come Back," she played on an Indian pottery drum, and for "We Are Many," she introduced some lively triangle playing where the text said "I would like to be able to touch a bell."

All of the songs were sung in English translations of the Spanish poetry. This a compromise, to be sure, when the focus is on the symbiotic relationship between poetry and music. Yet it is even more important that the words be understood immediately as they are sung. Lyric poetry is to be heard, not read. And even though Souza's native language is Portuguese, she sang the English with a very understandable mid-American accent.

Souza and Simon made exquisite music of the poetry, creating an outstanding tribute to Pablo Neruda.

boston.com

THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

She breaks down musical boundaries Luciana Souza sings with no fear, winning respect of her peers

The Boston Globe

By Bill Beuttler, Globe Correspondent | March 17, 2006

Three of Luciana Souza's four most recent CDs have earned her Grammy nominations, including "Duos II," which this year was edged out for best jazz vocal album by Dianne Reeves and the "Good Night, and Good Luck" soundtrack. But Souza's not a big star yet by any means. What popularity she has remains largely confined to the jazz cognoscenti and her fellow musicians, the latter of whom seem uniformly to adore her.

High on the list of things they admire about Souza is her willingness to take risks. Consider the rapid-fire unison lines she sings with guitarist Romero Lubambo on "Duos II," the album they'll likely draw heavily from in their Bank of America Celebrity Series double bill with Joe Lovano tomorrow night at Sanders Theatre.

Souza, 39, and Lubambo have been playing together for a decade. But while they've built up a large repertoire of material over the years, they rarely have occasion to practice together beyond sound checks. It can sometimes come back to haunt them in concert, Souza admits.

"We have a way of doing them that hopefully comes out clean," Souza explains, laughing. "Some nights we get into trouble, but even that is exciting for the audience. You try your best, and sometimes it succeeds. Sometimes we fail miserably, and we go back and go, 'Here we go one more time,' and just try again in front of people. We always do it with great spirit."

Souza's musical fearlessness was instilled early in childhood when, growing up in Sao Paulo, she had the advantage of having Hermeto Pascoal as her godfather. "He would say to me, 'Don't fear it. It's only music,'" Souza recalls. "That's a phrase he said to me over and over and over again. He'd play a melody on the piano for me, and I'd sing back and say, 'Oops.' I'd make a mistake or something -- 'break my teeth,' like we say in Portuguese. And he'd say, 'No, no, no -- don't worry. It's only music.' So I grew up with this spirit."

Souza's love of jazz stems from her father bringing home borrowed albums from a radio station record library he passed on his way to his job writing jingles. "He would bring home these records that were just amazing," says Souza. "I listened to Bill Holman and Stan Kenton on big band records -- things that I would never go toward naturally growing up in Brazil. . . . A lot of Sinatra, a lot of Carmen McRae."

In 1985, Souza followed her guitarist brother Eduardo to Berklee College of Music. She spent most of the next dozen years in Boston, earning her master's at New England Conservatory and returning to Berklee to teach until joining the faculty at Manhattan School of Music in 1998. Her recorded work as a leader began around the same time, with five of her six CDs coming out on Sunnyside Records since 2000. Her Grammy nominees include Brazilian standards ("Brazilian Duos" and "Duos II") and North American and South American standards ("North and South").

Souza's side work also tends to push past boundaries. Lately it has included her wordless vocals with Maria Schneider's orchestra and classical work with Argentine composer Osvaldo Golijov. Such boldness in her choice of projects earns Souza added respect from critics and musicians.

Esperanza Spalding, who'll play bass with Lovano's quartet tomorrow, says she is constantly wowed by Souza's work. "I'll hear an album -- anything from Hermeto Pascoal to Danilo Perez," Spalding says, "and I'm like, 'Man, that singer's so killin'.' And it's always [Souza] -- every time when I hear something crazy, and the voice blows my mind."

That Souza's music impresses Grammy nominators is great for her career. But she says it's important for other reasons.

"I don't record for a major label, I don't do straight-ahead jazz, and I'm not a famous artist," Souza explains. "So that says a lot. It gives a lot of hope, I think, to younger musicians coming up."