

Diane Marino

Interview by Joe Patitucci

Jazz Inside: Could you talk about your new recording *Loads of Love*, which features Houston Person, and how it developed from concept to finished product?

Diane Marino: *Loads of Love* evolved from my desire to record an album of standards from the Great American Songbook. I wanted to choose songs that were known but not overly recorded. Houston Person was influential in choosing this direction — it was something he had suggested a couple of years ago after we had worked together on my third CD *Just Groovin'*. While researching songs, I was drawn in the direction of the discography of Shirley Horn. I admire Shirley's wonderful playing and singing. Her tune selection is full of bluesy swinging songs and very emotional ballads. I was unfamiliar with some of these songs and it was a joy to discover them. Houston was very helpful in choosing songs for this project — Duke Ellington's; "It Shouldn't Happen To A Dream" is one he suggested. When I chose "I Didn't Know What Time It Was," Houston would say, "Make sure you include the verse in the beginning ... it's an important part of the song, and very often doesn't get included in a recording." Houston has a very broad knowledge of the American Songbook and his direction in planning this CD was invaluable. After deciding on the tunes, I spent considerable time at the piano coming up with the arrangements that would work with the songs. We didn't want to dwell on a great deal of soloing. Instead, we focused on the song itself — concentrating on the lyric and melody. Finally when schedules permitted the studio was booked. Houston arrived and we had one run-

grow up in an environment filled with music and song. My mother was my earliest musical influence and both my parents were extremely supportive of my musical abilities. When my first piano teacher felt that I needed to "move on to advance," he suggested contacting the Julliard School for a new private teacher. That teacher guided me in preparing for an audition for the High School for the Performing Arts. A school such as "PA" is an amazing opportunity for any student of music, dance or drama. Three years of intensive study in a rich environment suited for all serious minded developing artists. The original "Fame" school was situated on West 46th Street, right in the heart of Times Square and the theatre district. An interesting and colorful place to experience while walking

from the subway station to class! The courses at Performing Arts High School prepared me well for college at Mannes College of Music. At that time Mannes was located on East 74th Street, in a quiet brownstone-lined street — quite a change from Times Square! My private piano studies were with concert pianist Murray Perahia, who at the time was himself a recent graduate from Mannes — another excellent school in New York City. Often musicians from the other "sister" music colleges in Manhattan (Manhattan School of Music, Julliard) would interact and spend time together, sharing music, ideas and gig experiences. In this way it was like a close-



life, friends, school and around the city that inspired your interest in music?

DM: As I mentioned, my earliest interest in music was inspired by the fact that there was always music in my family home. My mother would sing constantly at home. She was not a professional singer, but music was a huge part of her life. I would hear great standards and show tunes from her all the time. She also played piano by ear, having no formal training — just an incredible love of music. Actually that's how I began to play piano, at about age 8, by ear — recreating what I would hear on the radio. Fortunately for me I was given piano lessons to further my natural abilities and so I became very focused on what I knew I would do for the rest of my life. Music became the vehicle from which I had to best express myself. Although classically trained, I would also spend hours at a time just improvising what I would hear inside my head. My fellow music students would later inspire and influence me to listen to Jazz. As many of my friends were already gigging, they encouraged me to do so and urged me to develop a vocal repertoire as well. I always loved singing and so combining the two came pretty natural to me.

JJ: How did your classical training on piano provide a foundation for pursuits into jazz improvisation and as a vocalist.

DM: Having a foundation in classical piano gives you the facility and dexterity to play all styles of music. I think it must be the best way for any pianist to begin their studies. Having somewhat small sized hands, I had to work that

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through the day before the session. Not wanting to be too pre-conceived in structure, some of the forms of the tunes actually developed in the studio. Mixing and mastering was done in another studio and *Loads of Love* was completed!

JJ: What was it like for you growing up in New York?

DM: New York City is and always will be an amazing place to grow up in. I was fortunate to

knit musical community. Of course growing up in New York City had all the cultural advantages of the best museums and sights of the greatest city in the world — a melting pot for people from all over the world. You're exposed to so many different cultures, music and languages — all at an incredibly fast pace that prepares you for just about any challenge that awaits!

JJ: What were some of the ideas, people and events that you were exposed to in your family

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much harder to develop the proper technique and skill required playing the demanding repertoire I was studying. Chopin and Beethoven are my favorites, and their beautiful melodies always remained in my mind. The melodic phrasing in the repertoire probably translates to how I hear a vocal phrase today. It all connects and applies to whatever I'm singing and/or playing.

JJ: Could you discuss the jazz artists and or recordings that most influenced your interest in improvised music?

DM: Sarah Vaughn, Nancy Wilson, Dinah Washington, Carmen McRae, Shirley Horn, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett are among my favorite singers to listen to and who have influenced me the most. The soulfulness on Nancy, Dinah, Sarah and Shirley has had a profound influence in the way I hear and shape a melody. Frank Sinatra's phrasing is unsurpassed and has taught me to sing a lyric as if speaking to someone... to be a 'conversational singer'. There are so many influential pianists — Oscar Peterson, Monk, Gene Harris, Art Tatum. I love the classical influence as well as the bluesy-ness of their playing. Coltrane, Miles ... these were the first musicians I listened to when I was first introduced to Jazz. They're still among my favorites...

JJ: What are the musical and business benefits and the challenges of being married to a fellow artist, namely your husband Frank who is an accomplished upright bassist?

DM: Frank and I have been working together for over three decades. People often ask, "How does that work?" I tell them "It either does or it doesn't"! In our case, *it does!* Music is what brought us together and is a common bond. Playing together for so many years, we've developed a kind of musical "sixth sense". Frank is a very accomplished jazz and classical bassist. His bass lines as well as solos are so melodic and harmonically supportive. He has greatly influenced my playing. The "business" part of our musical life can be a challenge — as it is with all musicians. Frank is more the "business type." Thank goodness! I prefer to keep my focus on the mu-

sic. This works out nicely! Another business benefit is the fact that our instrumentation of Piano/Vocals/Bass makes us very self-contained, even though we enjoy performing as a quartet most times.

JJ: Talk about the mentoring that you have experienced from various influential artists and invaluable guidance you received.

DM: My mentors have largely come from the artists and recordings I have listened to over the years. Besides the artists I previously mentioned, I've had the pleasure of working with many wonderful musicians over the many years I have performed. You never stop learning as long as you keep listening. For my latest recording, *Loads of Love*, Houston Person's guidance was an invaluable asset. His approach to playing these standards focuses on the melody and so he was pretty adamant about that. He also believes in spontaneity and so, although I had arranged the tunes prior to our session, some of the forms and amount of soloing was left "to the moment" in the studio.

JJ: What are your opinions about the benefits or shortcomings of the academic route versus performance and apprenticeship in the real world — an approach that had, in the past, been the pathway to a performance career?

DM: I really believe both are important. You can't substitute one for the other. The knowledge gained from an academic background in Jazz is so important to develop a keen sense of harmony and repertoire. However there is so much to be learned just by playing with other people. That's when it's time to put all that theory in the back of your mind and just listen and play from the soul. There are aspects of performance that can only be learned by constant playing with others. Listening is number one and the experience is invaluable.

JJ: What words of wisdom or encouragement from some of the influential artists with whom you have worked, have resonated with you in a way that has inspired your character and the way you lead your life?

DM: I think the most important thing I've always heard is to remain true to yourself. I've always tried to do what comes naturally to me. I

don't like pretentiousness. I just try to stay focused and stay on course no matter what obstacles I'm faced with. The first thing you have to believe in is yourself.

JJ: The music world, the jazz world are replete with temptations associated with varying desires for power, fame, fortune that can have the potential to compromise one's focus, one's integrity and character. What do you do to maintain your focus and to ensure that you minimize those kinds of influences and people?

DM: Again, a focus and a belief in one's self will lead you to depend on yourself as opposed to others. I think I'm a pretty good judge of character and can usually tell when a person is being sincere or not.

JJ: What do you do to relax when you're not making music?

DM: Movies, movies, movies! I'm a huge fan. I think it's so important to every once in a while turn everything else off and "escape". For me, that's a great story and great acting. I never turn away from the music, though. I can get completely enthralled in a beautiful film score. I also enjoy long walks to clear the mind and relax.

JJ: Is there anything you'd like to discuss or promote for which I haven't prompted you?

DM: I would like to mention my love for Brazilian Jazz as well. My first two CDs contain some great Brazilian tunes from Jobim, Joao Bosco & Dori Caymmi - which I sing in Brazilian Portuguese. During the early 90's I began researching the vast Brazilian repertoire from Jobim as well as other great composers. From listening to such great singers as Elis Regina, Gal Costa, Joao Bosco, Clara Nunes and others, I soon developed a sizeable repertoire of Bossa Novas and Sambas. In 1993, together with my husband Frank, we formed a nine-piece Samba group — "Som Brasileiro". I sang the band's repertoire entirely in Portuguese, with the help of some coaching by a dear friend from Brazil). We recorded one CD and performed at many Jazz Festivals and events. I still incorporate the Bossas and lighter sambas in my Jazz performances today.

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Joe Locke

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JJ: Ron Carter, Little Jimmy Scott, Vic Juris, Grover Washington Jr., Cecil Taylor, Bob Berg, Kenny Barron, Eddie Henderson, Eddie Gomez, John Hicks are among the influential jazz artists with whom you've performed or recorded. Talk about some of the key understandings about performance, and or music business, and or leadership that you might have gleaned from those experiences and associations.

JJ: I've learned from them all. All of these people play with 100% commitment. They have

taught me many things about being a musician and a human being, by way of their example.

JJ: Could you define what integrity and good character mean to you?

JL: If music is a reflection of our humanity, then integrity and good character mean everything.

JJ: How do you deal with the tyranny of the ego that has the potential to impact anyone with fans or an audience?

JL: It is the nature of the human being to struggle with ego. I wrestle with mine every day.

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for power, fame, fortune that can have the potential to compromise one's focus, one's integrity and character. What do you do to maintain your focus and to ensure that you minimize those kinds of influences and people?

JL: Fame? Fortune? Thankfully I don't have those problems!!! Seriously, I have always tried to focus on the music, on trying to become a better player. That in itself is a tall order.

JJ: If there is one for you, what is the connection between music and spirituality?

JL: They're one and the same.

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