

REAL BLUES

m a g a z i n e

DIANE MARINO: JUST GROOVIN' (M&M RECORDS)

In the 30 years I've been reviewing albums/CDs I've come to realize that there are certain things you can 'bet on' and while some are Positive 'Truths' there are unfortunately several Negative 'learned-from-experience' attitudes I've incorporated. Readers will know how often I've 'sermonized' over the years when it comes to the vocal talents of Caucasians.

When I say that 90 % of CDs by female Blues/Jazz vocalists don't get a second listen let alone a review, I'm not exaggerating. I don't enjoy bashing 'talent', I actually avoid it by employing our "If you haven't got anything good to say..." stance and I do hope that every CD by a female artist (of light complexion) is going to be a great one. But, I'm usually let down, oftentimes by the 'imitating-Koko Taylor school-of-vocals' or the 'Joplin shriek fest'. So, as this issue of REAL BLUES actually contains reviews of 3 or 4 exceptional CDs by White female vocalists I'm a very happy man! And, this artist, **Diane Marino**, is the one who REALLY delivers the goods. There's a lot of do's/don'ts when it comes to singing i.e. singing in key, pitch, timing and discovering what your strongest keys to sing in are. But then there's also that most important factor that can't be learned or created. It's the natural timbre of one's voice, the thing that makes people either love you, hate you or be totally unmoved in either direction. We all have our favorite artists whose voice stays attractive to us without fail, and we usually know this from the very first listen. Something inside of us, perhaps instinctive, causes us to react with unbridled enthusiasm to every verse that comes from this artist's mouth and sometimes it may just be a particular song that contains that magic. (One wonders if there's ever been any type of formal study on the topic of 'What-voices-move-us-and-why'). I can say without hesitation that Diane Marino possesses one of those rare voices that grabs hold of you and gives you nothing but total pleasure from beginning to end (of this CD). I'm not a fan of **Diana Krall**, but I mention her name because this recording is of the same genre of music (i.e. Bluesy Jazz/Jazzy Blues) and Krall should be so lucky to sound anything like this. Diane Marino glides through these tunes with such finesse and a warm persona that I'm inclined to wonder if there's ANYONE better. If there is, we haven't heard them. This CD is an independent production on Marino's own M&M Label but I'm sure by this time next year she'll be signed to a major Jazz label. What's really moving about this disc is that Diane tackles 12 of her all-time favorite tunes from the 1960s (mainly) and she's chosen several songs that are heavily identified with mega-star vocalists. If you fail at this you fail hard, but Marino has the abilities to make you totally forget the originals and focus solely on her warm, sometimes sultry, but always classy delivery. And, while this is an independent release, the production calibre is nothing short of magnificent. Listen to this list of guest players: **Cole Burgess** (alto sax), **Kirk Whalum** (tenor & soprano sax), **Houston Person** (tenor sax), **Felix Cavaliere** (vocals/organ), **Wycliffe Gordon** (trombone) and album session players are **Diane Marino** (piano & keyboards), **Chris Brown** (drums), husband **Frank Marino** (bass), **Andy Russ** (guitar), **Sam Levine Mitch Reilly** and **Doug Moffatt** (saxes), **Scott Ducaj** and **Joe Gross** (trumpet), **Chris Dunn** and **Bill Huber** (trombone) and believe it or not;

a REAL string section made up of luminaries **David Angell** (violin), **Monissa Angell** (viola), **David Davidson** (violin) and **Anthony LaMarchina** (cello) – what a big, beautiful difference this human string section makes! "Baby I'm Yours" opens the disc and as soon as Diane starts to sing you realize you're in for a rare treat. Here's a woman with a supremely attractive voice and she's got it trained like an Olympic



gymnast. But there is absolutely NO trace of excess and she knows when to lay back and when to take flight and soar. Burgess' alto sax solo is inspired to say the least. "So Much In Love" is a perfect vehicle for Diane and on this tune (like the rest of the CD) she's done an amazing job with the arrangements. This is one superbly talented lady. While "So Much..." is a Pop number anyone who can appreciate great music will focus on the elegance. "Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye" is a **John D.**

Loudermilk tune that's been done many times before, but never like this. This is pure Beauty. If this doesn't make you melt then you ain't got a Soul! This is her song now and Houston Person delivers his Bluesy sax with so much deep feeling that you'll quickly understand why the man is considered (by those with taste/smarts) to be the Greatest living tenor man. I played this one over and over and then we slipped into that mid 1960s masterpiece, "Groovin'" and within seconds I was totally enthralled by this Marino/Felix Cavaliere duet. For those of you who don't know, Felix was a member of America's only legitimate White Soul Band, **The Rascals**, and he's also the co-writer and original vocalist on this tune. What a treat to hear this wonderful tune reworked so sublimely. On "Anyone Who Had A Heart" Diane really cuts loose and delivers a Grammy-worthy vocal performance that'll stop you dead in your tracks. "Baby It's You" is another winner that allows us to hear Diane's bluesy piano and once again, Houston Person lets loose with his Big Sax. Kudos to Diane for reworking and delivering a winning "Walking In The Rain" and while everyone of the 12 tracks are exceptional (for a variety of reasons) Diane's smoky version of "Dedicated To The One I Love" is stunning as is the **Barbara Mason** classic "Yes I'm Ready". There's also lots of magic on "Hello Stranger", the Atlantic Records Soul gem from **Barbara Lewis**. This is one tune that I thought no-one could/would cover but once again, Diane Marino steals it. Don't be surprised if this amazing woman becomes a household name and frequent recipient of Grammys as you can't really expect less for a talent this broad and deep. It also doesn't hurt that she's beautiful to look at, but that's a really secondary ingredient when standing next to the beauty of her voice and music. For all of you who dig music for its beauty and artistic merit, I urge you to get hip to Diane Marino. She's got that special something that so very few ever possess and with that in mind, I bestow our highest rating – 6 Bottles for the ultimate in Bluesy Jazz. What was once NYC's personal treasure now becomes the property of The World.

...A. Grigg