

Tianna Hall, a New Artist to Watch!

by Skoot Larson

It's a rare and wonderful thing when a new artist comes along that turns your wig around and leaves you mildly dazed with pleasure. That is what happened to this writer when I heard "**Lost in the Stars**," the premier compact disc offering from Houston, Texas native **Tianna Hall**.

Classically trained, Tianna began her vocal career singing opera and musical theater, as well as copping a title from the Miss America Organization. Three years ago, pianist Paul English suggested that Ms. Hall's creative singing abilities would be well suited to improvised music. Ms. Hall found her natural instincts and abilities well suited to jazz.

Those talents are very nicely displayed in her recent CD release, with accompaniment provided by the **Mexico City Jazz Trio**, a group much deserving recognition on their own. The Mexico City Jazz Trio is pianist, and arranger for most the tunes on this disc, **Miguel Villicana**, bass player **Agustin Bernal** and drummer **Gabriel Puentes**.

"**Lost in the Stars**" grabs one's attention from the first note: It kicks off with the old pop standard "**You Don't Know Me**," as a duo of voice and contrabass. Not only is Hall's operatic training apparent from the start, but bassist Bernal struts out a fine solo as well, interspersing his straight time with a few bars of speeded-up riffing.

While Ms. Hall displays intense vocal talent and training, she is not afraid to play with her own rhythm or bend the notes to fit her liking. In fact, Tianna Hall shows skill in improvising the lyric, tempo and feel as well as the chord structure of the selected songs. The lady bring her own sound to the recording, with a natural sense of swing, never compromising or sacrificing on what she creates. Hall sounds as though she is living every syllable of the words she puts forth, and her voice has a clarity that keeps the words real and understandable.

The trio is also superb in their accompaniment, setting a comfortable and intriguing framework for each number without ever overpowering Ms. Hall. Much of the backing uses a rather minimalist form to enhance and compliment the singer's approach, but when the band jumps in for solos, it's *all there*.

Highlights of this fine offering include Leonard Bernstein's not-often-enough recorded "Cool" from "West Side Story." Tianna Hall's obvious 'cool' starts up where Ricki Lee Jones left off, with a mischievous sparkle to this 'hip' musical poetry. "Cool" proves an excellent showcase for all four musicians. Villicana's keyboard work and Bernal's strings swing at just the right gait over Puentes' brushes as the story unfolds.

Tony Newley's "Pure Imagination" provides a grand vehicle for Tianna Hall's scat singing prowess, and the classic "If I Were A Bell" shows this group's unique abilities as well. On the latter, Bassist Bernal launches into a memorable and *very vouty* arco bass solo with his own vocal accompaniment an octave above the strings ala Slam Stewart.

I could go on for some time, but the bottom line here is **sensitivity!** Every one of the fourteen cuts on Tianna Hall's "Lost in the Stars" is a winner that could stand alone as an example of what's good about today's jazz scene. You really must listen to it for yourself.

"Lost in the Stars" is available at cdbaby.com, and you won't regret adding this to your collection. In fact, you may find you have a collector's item on your hands when the rest of the world discovers this amazing lady.