

Tierney Sutton's "Other Side" is Quiet Fire!

by Skoot Larson

Right from her first recording, **Introducing Tierney Sutton** in 1995, this lady has left her own indelible mark on jazz. Tierney Sutton's "introduction" showed a vocalist already musically mature but full of the exuberance of youth. Over the past decade, Tierney has held together the same band members; pianist Christian Jacobs, Trey Henry on contrabass and the drumming talents of Ray Brinker, which is itself a great feat in our current fast-changing world. The lady's simpatico team has allowed Ms. Sutton to hone her styling to perfection in a comfortable and familiar setting.

The above musicians provided the backing on Tierney's first outing with the edition of Buddy Childer's flugelhorn on just one track. On subsequent offerings, the same core group has experimented with a multiple horn lineup as well as a full orchestra, all skillfully accomplished to enhance Ms. Sutton's unique approach to the music.

On Tierney Sutton's latest compact disc from TelArc Jazz, **On the Other Side**, she has returned to the original trio setting, with the vocal humor and trumpet of Jack Sheldon joining her for one cut. Much of this recording smolders with a haunting, torchy feel, the lady's arrangements painting fascinating contrasts as a backdrop over which her voice constructs rhythms and lyrics. If you aren't familiar with Tierney Sutton, she has a sweet, expressive timbre with an exceptional range, both of which she employs to turn ordinary songs into superlative works of art.

On a pair of her selections, "Happy Day are Here Again," and "Get Happy," Tierney demonstrate how the tunes can be delivered both as a sort of minor dirge and, on a subsequent track as up, bouncy parades of joy, the two sides of each number almost reminding one of jazz's roots in the funereal music of old New Orleans. Each of these tunes has their two separate takes to show their juxtaposition.

In spite of the sometimes-dusky treatment of the material, happiness is the basic glue that holds all Tierney's tunes into a common fluid program throughout this disc. Beside the above mentioned songs, titles include "You Are My Sunshine," "Happy Talk," "I Want to Be Happy," "Sometimes I'm Happy," and "Make Someone Happy." All this

gladness is comfortably anchored with a few darker ballads like “Glad to Be Unhappy,” and “Haunted Heart.”

Tierney’s duet with Jack Sheldon on “I Want to Be Happy,” is a lighthearted treasure that’s worth the price of the album on its own! Jack begins the intro, which becomes a dialog continuing right through to the spoken improvisation that carries the song out. Jack is his witty and irreverent self, but here he’s paired with a perfect match in the lovely-voice Ms. Sutton, not to mention some wonderful trumpet fireworks from Jack sandwiched into this unforgettable track.

Much more than a “singer,” this work nicely exhibits that Tierney Sutton’s voice is a finely tuned instrument of improvisation, more so than any trumpet or saxophone as she can create around the lyrics as well as using harmonies, rhythm and tone. Ms. Sutton’s band members are an integral part of the show, providing a tasty balance in each of the selections.

As an example, on “Sometimes I’m Happy,” Trey Henry provides a sort of pyramidic vamp along with Ray Brinker’s light sticks tapping the rims of his drums. It should be noted here that Henry’s bass solo on this tune is a valuable gem in itself.

Christian Jacobs has a natural feel as an accompanist. His keyboard licks are light and supportive as Ms. Sutton sings, never stepping on her words or getting in her way. Yet when the spotlight finds Jacobs, he is a grand creator in his own right: a master at finding just the right notes while keeping it melodic and pleasant.

To date, every one of Tierney Sutton’s recordings have been exception creations, flowing like a themed musical play and packed with good sounds and inspiration. The only thing finer than her recordings is to see Tierney and her group in live performance. Tierney Sutton’s stage presence is every bit as powerful as her voice is wonderful.