

LORI CARSILO: A LIFE IN MUSIC (500 words)

San Francisco jazz singer Lori Carsillo is best known for her revelatory work interpreting the Great American Songbook with an incisive but emotionally restrained sensibility. But her muse has led her in many different directions, and on or off the bandstand music flows through her every endeavor.

Since releasing the first of her four albums on her label Tru Blu Lu Records, Carsillo (pronounced “car-SILL-oh”) has forged enduring ties with some of the region’s most accomplished improvisers. Her debut album *Bittersweet* introduced Carsillo’s unpretentious less-is-more sound, an approach championed by legendary educator, producer, and record label owner Herb Wong, who wrote the album’s liner notes. Guitarist Dave Mac Nab’s sinewy lines serve as a lyrical foil for Carsillo, while the superb rhythm section tandem of drummer Jason Lewis and the late, lamented bassist John Shifflett provides supremely responsive support.

She celebrated the CD’s release at Yoshi’s, and a return engagement at the storied Oakland jazz club inspired a thematic concert focusing on the music of Cole Porter. The overwhelmingly positive response to the material led to Carsillo’s critically hailed second album, 2004’s *Cole Porter...Old Love, New Love, True Love*, featuring bassist Devon Hoff, drummer Alan U’Ren, trombonist Jeff Cressman, and Dave Mac Nab’s guitar, arrangements and production. The project cemented her reputation as a thoughtful song stylist with an excellent ear for material ideally suited for her clear, unaffected vocals.

By the time Carsillo recorded 2014’s *Sugar and Smoke*, she’d expanded her repertoire to encompass Bacharach and David, Alan and Marilyn Bergman, and Bob Dorough. With pianist Adam Shulman, the accompanist of choice for brilliant song stylists like Paula West and Ed Reed, she found another ideal arranger and interlocutor. Her latest album, 2018’s *A Dream or Two* is a lithe pianoless session that accentuates the deliberate emotional calibration of her approach.

Part of what makes her such a fascinating artist is that she’s never been interested in sticking to the straight ahead path. In 2017, she was featured in the jazz play *The Cool* which ran for three sold-out weeks in San Francisco’s Mission District. She released a lovely children’s album, *Lullabies for Little Dreamers*, and two CDs with the Theremin-powered Project: Pimento, which turns familiar songs into an uncanny retro-space-age soundtrack.

Fascinated by the possibilities of multimedia productions, she delved into music videos, creating pieces for her original material, some in collaboration with Dollars & Donuts Productions. She continues to pursue songwriting, often collaborating with Jeffrey Burr. She’s studying piano for pleasure and to expand her compositional toolkit. And she’s exploring theatrical situations. A master storyteller with no shortage of new tales to tell, Carsillo continues to extend her creative purview. She’s a jazz artist with a restless streak, eager to discover what comes next.

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