

Linda Ciofalo



Critics on Linda's New Release 'Sun Set'

All About Jazz NY

By Marcia Hillman

Linda Ciofalo's *Sun Set* has connected all the dots to make for an impressive listening experience. Starting with a concept—songs with the word "sun" in the title, or sun-related—the package offers an eclectic collection of selections, innovative arrangements and performances by an engaging vocalist with major chops and choice instrumentalists: John di Martino (piano), John Hart (guitar), Marcus McLaurine (bass), Joel Frahm (sax) and Matt Wilson (drums).

Ciofalo's vocal clarity is refreshing and she knows what to do with her instrument. She can deliver a ballad reading with warmth, but also has enough of an edge to swing when necessary. The opening track, "Oh! What A Beautiful Morning," features Ciofalo's vocal floating over a 6/8 tempo accompanied by Frahm's fills. On "You Took Advantage of Me," Ciofalo swings, backed only by Wilson's wonderful hand drumming, and a straightforward reading of George Harrison's "Here Comes The Sun" takes us back to Beatletime. Another interesting material choice is a lovely and haunting reading of "Love Is Stronger Far Than We" from the film *A Man and A Woman*.

There is something to be said for every track. The players are well-attuned to each other and comprise a tight ensemble. Di Martino's piano work is outstanding; his harmonies and ability to play exactly what needs to be played behind a vocalist well on display. Frahm also delivers, wailing on his "Summertime" solo and also on "Midnight Sun." Hart has some shining moments on guitar and McLaurine's solid bass work throughout completes the picture. But, most of all, this is a vocalist's album and Ciofalo shows off her talent from start to finish. The CD bears more than one listening to discover all of its pleasurable dimensions.

Jersey Jazz

January '08 issue of "Jersey Jazz."

Joe Lang

Vocalist LINDA CIOFALO has a sound that is crystal clear, and a musicality that brings you into her performance like a moth is drawn to a flame. *Sun Set* (Lucky Jazz Music - No catalog number) is her second album, and is one that should earn her kudos galore. Her companions on this musical voyage are pianist John di Martino, who also had a hand in the arranging with Ciofalo, saxophonist Joel Frahm, guitarist John Hart, bassist Marcus McLaurine and drummer Matt Wilson, all of whom are exceptional players. Mixing standards, "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning," "You Took Advantage of Me," "Summertime," "Comes Love," "Midnight Sun," and "Lazy Afternoon" with some more contemporary selections from the likes of George Harrison ("Here Comes the Sun"), Francis Lai ("Love Is Stronger Far Than We"), Kurt Elling and Curtis Lundy ("Orange Blossoms in Summertime"), Madonna ("La Isla Bonita"), Lennon and McCartney ("I'll Follow the Sun"), Stevie Wonder ("Blame It on the Sun"), and Howlett P. Smith ("The Last Day of Summer"), Ciofalo creates a blending of material that flows naturally, and is completely coherent. Ciofalo demands some effort on the part of the listener, requiring you to listen carefully to her well-conceived interpretations of the songs that she has chosen for her program. She provides originality without sacrificing an ability to convey the lyrics with meaning and feeling. *Sun Set* provides a thoughtful and satisfying listening experience.

Jazz Improv Magazine

By Dan Bilawsky

Linda Ciofalo's *Sun Set*, her sophomore release on the Lucky Jazz Music label, is the perfect example of a well-balanced record. While many singers out there are adept at turning out great performances, a large number of them don't know how to develop a varied repertoire and put their own stamp on wellworn songs. As one might surmise from the album title and the songs performed within, Ciofalo uses the sun as the overriding theme on the twelve tracks on this record. Joel Dorn's liner essay, rightfully, mentions how "theme albums are very hard to pull off, but she did." The album begins with "Oh What A Beautiful Morning." Joel Frahm's saxophone work, soaring and diving in the spaces between Ciofalo's vocals, is superb on this track and the rhythm section, featuring Matt Wilson on drums, Marcus McLaurine on bass and John di Martino on drums, have great musical rapport. "You Took Advantage Of

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Me" is performed as a drum and vocal duo with Matt Wilson. Wilson's drumming, focusing on the snare drum (sans snares) and toms, combined with Ciofalo's scintillating scatting, gives this piece a tropical tinge. "Orange Blossoms In Summertime," a beautiful piece that Kurt Elling performs on *Flirting With Twilight*, is expertly melded with Gershwin's "Summertime" in this slow and slumbering, though never boring, performance. John Hart's guitar playing is front and center with Ciofalo's vocals at the top of "Here Comes The Sun." Ciofalo's interpretation of this Beatles hit takes a more relaxed approach and she, along with her fantastic band, breaths new life into the song by giving it a very organic and calming reading. "Comes Love" is the only song on the album that didn't really grab me as I listened to the CD. This trio reading gives McLaurine plenty of well-deserved solo space and Wilson has some fun with brushes.

The intensity, present in the strongest renditions of this song, resides in the delivery of the lyrics and this was overshadowed by the somewhat distracting rhythm section antics. This opinion aside, every other performance before and after is truly top shelf. Hart's guitar work is entrancing during "Love Is Stronger Far Than We." The guitar, bass and piano seem to stretch the very musical fabric of this song as Wilson's brushes create a soft stir underneath. Madonna's "La Isla Bonita" is driven by Matt Wilson's danceable drum rhythms. The samba-influences in the music are a perfect match to the samba references in the lyrics. John di Martino provides some great support and contributes some well-paced soloing on "I'll Follow The Sun." Ciofalo's stroll through "Midnight Sun" features Frahm's suave saxophone solo work, while "Lazy Afternoon" gives di Martino another opportunity to shine. The rhythm section, while keeping things at a slow simmer of a tempo, provides an excellent groove for Ciofalo's terrific reading of Stevie Wonder's "Blame It On The Sun." "The Last Day Of Summer" is a gorgeous song that eulogizes this sunny season as it will pass into recent, and then distant, memory. Calling Ciofalo a talent deserving more recognition would be an understatement and anybody who is waiting to discover another great female vocalist should check out this album!

All About Jazz

By Woodrow Wilkins

"Sunny," in addition to being a description of the weather, can be used in reference to a positive disposition. Linda Ciofalo creates a sunny atmosphere with *Sun Set*. Complemented by a small ensemble of sidemen, she delivers an album worthy of Janis Siegel or Tierney Sutton.

Inspired by a televised appearance of the legendary Sarah Vaughan, Ciofalo took an interest in vocal jazz in the 1980s. She earned a spot in a big band jazz orchestra, which led to her career as a New York nightclub singer, also performing at social functions, private parties and political fundraisers. In addition to her performance and recording career, music education is part of Ciofalo's universe. She has been a music teaching artist at the Lincoln Center Institute and head of the jazz vocal program at Cultural Arts High School on Long Island.

On *Sun Set*, Ciofalo is backed, in various combinations, by John di Martino on piano, John Hart on guitar, Marcus McLaurine on bass, Joel Frahm on saxophone and Matt Wilson on drums. The music is a mix of Broadway tunes, jazz standards and covers of pop songs.

Frahm's soprano sax helps set the tone of the delightful "Oh What a Beautiful Morning," from the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma*. Ciofalo's voice is like a flute that can speak. Frahm delivers a passionate solo during the instrumental break, wherein the other musicians show a little individuality while maintaining focus as a group.

Originality reigns on "Orange Blossoms in Summertime," a clever combination of Kurt Elling and Curtis Lundy's "Orange Blossoms" and Du Bose Heyward and George and Ira Gershwin's "Summertime." Ciofalo's lead is soothing throughout, while di Martino's piano and McLaurine's subtle bass help set the mood. Frahm adds another powerful solo.

Though still very much a jazz arrangement, the cover of the Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun" enjoys a pop feel, thanks largely to Hart's guitar solo.

Often, vocal jazz is dominated by the human voice. The sound may be good, but when the musicians are stuck in the background, there's little to differentiate the music from pop or R&B. Not so with *Sun Set*. Ciofalo is clearly the star of this show, but the sidemen get plenty to work with. Whether in the background or performing a solo, each musician contributes significantly, striking a perfect balance between vocals and instruments. And it's all done with a love for the art and a sunny outlook.

Linda Ciofalo

Jazz Police

Sun Set: Warm Tales from Linda Ciofalo

Contributed by Andrea Canter, Contributing Editor

Thursday, 06 December 2007

Linda Ciofalo might be a familiar name on the New York vocal jazz scene, but she wasn't yet a blip on my radar screen when I received a copy of her new recording, *Sun Set* (Lucky Jazz). But I'll bet she'll soon be one of the bright stars in the jazz sky. Ciofalo celebrated the CD's release at The Kitano in Manhattan on December 6th and undoubtedly will be heard frequently around the Big Apple and beyond.

Although accepted into New York's High School of Music and Art, Linda Ciofalo did not attend due to her parents' disapproval of her career aspirations. Yet she never gave up the idea, attending evening classes in classical voice and musical theater at Juilliard. Her interest in jazz sparked by a television broadcast of Sarah Vaughn, Linda auditioned among 300 singers and gained a featured vocalist spot in The Big Band Association's jazz orchestra. Her debut recording of standards, pop tunes and original compositions, *Take the High Road* (1999), received a lot of attention in New York as well as on international radio. Soon she had club dates at the Blue Note, Iridium, 55 Bar and as part of the Long Island Distinguished Artists series. She's shared the stage with such notables as Mark Murphy and Les Paul, and has received numerous arts grants. In addition to vocal performance, Linda Ciofalo is a dedicated educator, recruited recently by the Lincoln Center Institute/Tilles Center as music-teaching artist in the New York State public school system, and directs the jazz vocal program for the Long Island High School of the Arts.

Sun Set finds Ciofalo in the company of New York's finest, including saxophonist Joel Frahm, guitarist John Hart, pianist John DiMartino, bassist Marcus McLaurine and drummer Matt Wilson. The musical selections feature wide-ranging, sun-inspired material with the full quartet as well as interactions with just one or two instruments. Concept albums don't always work, but this concept—the sun, the tropics, warmth—has given wide berth. Linda's choices are intelligent and lovely, from Broadway ("Oh What a Beautiful Morning") to Fab Four (George Harrison's "Here Comes the Sun;" Lennon and McCartney's "I'll Follow the Sun"), from standards ("Come Love," "You Took Advantage of Me," "Midnight Sun") to Stevie Wonder ("Blame it on the Sun") and Madonna ("La Isla Bonita") to the beautiful "Orange Blossoms in Summertime" (Kurt Elling/Curtis Lundy) that melds cleverly with Gershwin's "Summertime."

Ciofalo's tone is as bright as the "bright golden haze on the meadow" of the opening Rodgers and Hammerstein track, supported by bass counterpoint and soprano sax, with some interesting percussive accents from the always-busy Matt Wilson. This band wastes no time demonstrating that it is worthy of the finest voice....which she has. But perhaps her phrasing even outshines her tone, and while the voices and style are quite different, her inventive rendering of lyrics is reminiscent of Kendra Shank. The tracks with small ensembles give this project a very individual imprint. "You Took Advantage of Me" is a duet with Matt Wilson, and perhaps there is no better percussive foil for a vocalist than Wilson, who finds more voices within a trapset than in a typical choir. The comparison to Kendra Shank seems more appropriate here, as Ciofalo conjures the multiple voices and rhythms of the full quintet, whether scatting or singing the lyrics, never losing the melodicism of the original. "Come Love" features a sultry interaction between Linda and Marcus McLaurine, and it's a toss-up as to which musician creates the most slinky lines. Her scat here essentially adds a horn to the mix while McLaurine gives the underappreciated bass an almost sexy persona. On the last chorus Matt Wilson joins the fun with some clinky and rumbly brushwork. (Even Linda can't suppress a laugh at Wilson's finale.) The closing track, "The Last Day of Summer," features Linda and John DiMartino, each following an individual direction and allowing the harmonic structure to tie their paths together.

Previously I had only heard Kurt Elling sing his "Orange Blossoms in Summertime" and Ciofalo makes no attempt to imitate his version, although I think a duet with Kurt would be quite interesting. She elongates key phrases, coasting easily into the Gershwin interlude such that the two tunes become one. Frahm again scores gold with a soprano solo that wrings passion from every note and DiMartino is as elegant as he is clever in his support. Covering music by the various Beatles has become almost a fad among jazz musicians in the past few years, thus it can be a challenge to create a fresh version of "Here Comes the Sun" or "I'll Follow the Sun"—Ciofalo succeeds on both tracks. "Here Comes the Sun" has a bit of a folk and country vibe thanks in considerable part to guitarist John Hart's contributions as well as Linda's unique modifications of melody and phrasing. On "I'll Follow the Sun," Linda plunges into a surprisingly lower key than anticipated, displaying her wide vocal range; DiMartino swings it lightly and embellishes his solo with thick but gentle chords. The lyric is taken to heart, with a touch of sadness permeating the "sunshine."

Linda Ciofalo

The remaining tracks offer diverse treats (if some are loosely tied to the solar theme)—a sweet “Love Is Stronger Far Than We;” a snappy tropical groove on “La Isla Bonita” featuring another duet with Wilson on the first verse; a sultry syncopation (and Frahm’s tenor sax) on “Midnight Sun;” a sinewy “Lazy Afternoon;” and yet another duet with McLaurine to introduce “Blame It On the Sun”, which again features a bluesy tinge from John Hart’s guitar.

Live or on record, Linda Ciofalo and company bring a class act of inventive vocals and virtuosic interplay to to any audience.

JazzReview.com - Featured Artist: Linda Ciofalo by Michael Perry

Linda Ciofalo has a voice that reaches out and grabs you. You just have to pay attention. Her vocal talent is among the best heard today. She is in great company, as much of a talented vocalist as Jane Monheit or Sophie Milman. She is one of the few new musicians who can transfer the passion and emotion of their craft to the listener. She is truly an instrument on her own. My guess is that she would sound equally great without a band. She is accompanied by several great musicians: John Hart on guitar, John di Martino on piano, Joel Frahm on sax, drummer Matt Wilson, and Marcus McLaurine on bass. All talented musicians that add to the quality of this project. Her newest release is a compilation of songs by such greats as Rogers and Hammerstein, Gershwin, Lennon and McCartney and Stevie Wonder. Each song retains the character of the original, but is made even more outstanding by the addition of Linda’s magical vocals. She has a sophistication in her voice that maintains the integrity of these classic tunes. There is a realness in her sound that makes each melody her own. Her future is certain to be bright, and her own “sun set” is far off. Linda, keep up the beautiful music, and I look forward to hearing more from you, soon.

JazzChicago.net Review by Brad Walseth

Vocalist Linda Ciofalo has graced us with her second album featuring her lovely and warmly balanced voice. This time out, the songs are mostly all ones with a theme of “sunshine” or “summer,” making this a true “Sun Set.” Back by Marcus McLaurine on bass, John di Martino on piano, John Hart of guitar and the ubiquitous Matt Wilson on drums, the album also features the talents of Joel Frahm on sax.

Songs on this release range from the Rogers and Hammerstein tune “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning” (from “Oklahoma”), to Beatles songs like “Here Comes the Sun,” and “I’ll Follow the Sun,” Stevie Wonder’s “Blame it on the Sun,” Madonna’s “La Isla Bonita,” and the Mercer/Hampton standard “Midnight Sun.” Relying mostly on pop songs, Ciofalo and band manage to give them enough of a jazz feel to keep most listeners happy. Certainly, her smooth and subtle vocals are attraction enough most of the time.

All the players play supportively, with Hart’s guitar and Wilson’s drums quite appealing, while Frahm adds most of the musical fireworks. Ciofalo herself brings back memories of the great female singers of the golden age on songs like “Orange Blossoms in Summertime,” “Comes Love” and “Love is Stronger Far Than We,” where her vocals shine like a pair of sparkling eyes across a crowded room, but she isn’t afraid to take chances either, like on the Rodgers/Hart tune “You Took Advantage of Me,” where she performs as a duet with drummer Wilson.

Great music to put on to relax in a pleasant sunset, Linda Ciofalo’s “Sun Set” will surely please lovers of sweetly romantic female singers with its addictive blend of pop and jazz.

HotHouse By Elzy Kolb Solar Power

Singer Linda Ciofalo says the sun-related theme of her new CD Sun Set (Lucky Jazz), “sort of formed itself” when her list of possible songs included the likes of “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning” and “Midnight Sun.” As far as the CD title, “Sunset is my favorite, favorite, favorite time of day,” Linda says. “I like the idea of the concept, how it paints a picture for you, all of the different colors. It’s a quiet kind of album. Not sleepy, more like winding down at the end of the day.” The final tune, “The Last Day of Summer,” was writ-

Linda Ciofalo

ten by longtime friend Howlett Smith. "He really pushed me to become a jazz vocalist, to give up the pop stuff," she recalls. Linda's parents had advised her against trying to make a career of singing. "It's pretty obvious why," Linda says, laughingly acknowledging the image of the starving artist. Though they hoped she'd get the urge to sing out of her system, "My mom is amazed now at what's going on," with Linda learning the business side of music, and many radio stations adding Sun Set to their playlists. "I keep getting more and more ideas," Linda says, who already has plans for a couple of new recording projects in the works. "The fire is lit and it's not going out." Hear for yourself at the Sun Set CD release party for at Kitano on Dec. 6.

Westchester Times tribune

Her voice is a relief from the mediocrity heard in this age of the American Idol. No pitch issues, no over singing, no attitude, no pretense, just solid vocals. I could easily imagine her leaning on a piano in a nightclub, delivering the pure sound heard on Sun Set."
Tom Bock, Westchester Times Tribune, Yonkers Tribune and VOX radio.