

Roundup

Jazz From Four Corners

Disparate singers meet at a musical prime meridian.

By Scott Yanow

The four singers reviewed here hail jazz from far-flung areas of the globe, as well as from divergent musical backgrounds. While their heritages may vary, their latest recordings are all worthy of your attention.

Live (PRA) by **Randy Crawford** and Joe Sample will be a happy surprise to those who know the Macon, Georgia-born Crawford primarily as an R&B singer. During the past several years, her collaborations with keyboardist Sample — with whose Crusaders she scored the 1979 hit “Street Life” — have emphasized jazz and blues. On this 2008 live recording, she not only revisits some of her hits — “Rainy Night in Georgia,” “One Day I’ll Fly Away,” and of course, “Street Life” — but also credibly interprets “Every Day I Have the Blues,” “Feeling Good,” “This Bitter Earth” and “Me, Myself and I.” Rather than being accompanied by an orchestra or a funk group, Crawford is accompanied here by a jazz trio consisting of Sample; Joe’s son, bassist Nicklas Sample; and drummer Steve Gadd. For listeners unfamiliar with recent Crawford-Sample teamups, this wide-ranging and spirited program may be a revelation.

Born in France to a father from West Africa and a mother from Greece, **Elisabeth Kontomanou**, who is based in Sweden, has performed with top American and European jazz musicians. Although she didn’t grow up in the black church, on *Secret of the Wind* (Outnote), her vocals are so powerful, spiritual and purposeful that one would swear she was a full-time gospel singer. For this set of duets with pianist Geri Allen, she mainly performs slower material with meaningful lyrics, including Marvin Gaye’s “God is Love” and Leslie Bricusse’s “If I Ruled the World,” and the spirituals “Were You There” and “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” But she offers a brief change of pace with a swinging, lighthearted version of the Nat King Cole hit “L.O.V.E.”

The daughter of pianist-arranger Antonio Adolfo, **Carol Saboya** is well-known in her native Brazil, where she’s already released eight albums. *Belezas* (AAM) contains six songs apiece by Ivan Lins and Milton Nascimento and is her first CD to be widely available in the United States (not counting the two recorded with her father, who lives in South Florida). Singing in Portuguese and occasionally in English, Saboya boasts a beautiful voice, the feel of a true jazz improviser and genuine comfort with the material. Featuring a rhythm section that includes pianist Adolfo, plus guests Dave Liebman on soprano and tenor



Tessa Souter

saxes and Hendrik Meurkens on harmonica, *Belezas* serves not only as a fine introduction to Saboya, but, for the uninitiated, to the music of Lins and Nascimento, as well.

Born in London and based in New York City since 1997, **Tessa Souter** has always been open to the influences of folk music from various cultures. But *Beyond the Blue* (Motéma) takes quite a different tack, as she sings words to a dozen melodies taken from classical music. While “The Lamp is Low” and “My Reverie” date from the swing era, and “Baubles, Bangles and Beads” is from the 1950s, the other nine sets of lyrics were penned by Souter. Appropriating themes from works by Beethoven, Borodin, Albinoni, Brahms, Chopin, Schubert and Fauré, the singer inventively transforms them into jazz. Most impressive is her fresh rendition of Rodrigo’s “Concierto de Aranjuez,” which was introduced to the jazz world on Miles Davis’ *Sketches of Spain*. Joined by an all-star sextet that includes pianist Steve Kuhn, vibraphonist Joe Locke, saxophonist Joel Frahm and Gary Versace on accordion, Souter displays a lovely voice, subtle creativity and a real skill at writing lyrics on this intriguing set. ▲