



# Music

April 20, 2007

LISTENING WITH DIANNE REEVES

## Looking Beyond the Phrasing, to the Spirit

By [BEN RATLIFF](#)



Nacho Doce/Reuters

Dianne Reeves, pictured during a concert in January in Lisbon, is scheduled to perform tonight and tomorrow at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Allen Room.

DENVER — “It’s been cold here lately,” Dianne Reeves said this month, readying plates of food for a late lunch, “so I decided to make some lamb.” She laid out the meal on the center island of her kitchen here, including sweet iced tea made from hibiscus leaves brought home from Turkey and cornbread that she has been perfecting, trying to replicate a version she admired at a local restaurant. Explaining how she likes to cook, she said: “It’s the same thing with how I sing. I work with my ear and try to make it feel right, or I just keep changing it until I like the way it tastes.”

So does every musician. But from Dianne Reeves this formula sounds excessively humble. Ms. Reeves isn’t stumbling around in the dark; she has the training, the tools, the instrument. Hers is a big and forthright voice, one that sounds as if it might have been trained over the blare of a touring big band, except that such a model hardly exists anymore.

She is a jazz singer who has absorbed some of the loftiest and most difficult models: Sarah Vaughan, Betty Carter, Shirley Horn. She treats standards with skyscraper authority, drawing a circle of repertory wide enough to include material from her favorite singer-songwriters; she has her own vocal and performance devices, subdividing vowels into a dozen notes, pouring forth welcomes and singsong advice to her audience.

Her most recent record, which won her a fourth Grammy Award, was the soundtrack to the 2005 film “Good Night, and Good Luck,” in which she climbs into the 1950s without affectation. On it she performs standards with a small backing group, a setup reasonably close to the one she will use tonight and tomorrow at [Jazz at Lincoln Center](#)’s Allen Room. (Her trio will consist of the pianist Billy Childs, the bassist Reginald Veal and the drummer Gregory Hutchinson.) But she has also become known for her own songs, often concerned with, as she puts it, “telling stories”; they hit a gently counseling chord, encouraging pride and self-reliance.

She has been a long time forming. The present version of Dianne Reeves comes after 30 years of wending among swing-based jazz, West Coast pop-jazz of the 1980s and versions of black-diaspora songs and bossa nova from jobs with [Harry Belafonte](#) and Sergio Mendes. And before that, a lot of church singing.

Yet Ms. Reeves seems firmly of a place and time: the middle of America, and the middle of the 20th century. This comes out in her manners but also in her preoccupation with spirituality, and with a protective psychology that can accommodate frailty and self-doubt.

Last fall she turned 50. Since 1991 she has lived on a well-tended stretch of a well-traveled thoroughfare in the Park Hill neighborhood of Denver, five minutes from her mother (who still lives in the house where Ms. Reeves grew up) and not too much farther from her sister. She was home recently only for a brief stop between tours, but as friends and relatives came in and out of the kitchen through the afternoon, she seemed rooted.

Born in Detroit, she moved to Denver with her mother and her sister at the age of 2, after the death of her father. Her grandmother, Denverada Howard, was born in Denver in 1896 and named after the city, and her grandmother's father was a founding member of the oldest black church here, Shorter Community A.M.E. church in East Denver.

Ms. Reeves belonged to that church but also went to Roman Catholic school with daily Mass and attended a Baptist church on Sunday. "For us as kids," she said, "we had the feeling that there was nothing we couldn't do or deal with, because we believed in God and we believed that God would make a way."

A test came during the first school busing experiments in Denver, when Ms. Reeves was sent down the same road she now lives on, far into South Denver, to a white junior high school. It was a tense period: Parents of the white children wanted the black children out, and there were racist editorials in the local paper. In retaliation the school's black, Texan music teacher organized a revue that combined the poetry of [Langston Hughes](#) and songs like "Blowin' in the Wind," "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" and "Joy, Joy" by the Edwin Hawkins Singers.

"It was a powerful thing, and it served to bring people together," she said. "It really changed my life. I really understood that I wanted to sing songs that meant something to me."

Asked to listen to and comment on some music of her choosing, Ms. Reeves put forward Aretha Franklin first. "Amazing Grace," Ms. Franklin's live gospel album, released in 1972, was a record that hit Ms. Reeves hard in high school; at the time she was singing Franklin hits with a group of friends who called themselves the Mellow Moods.

"Every time one of her new songs came out, you'd learn it," she said. "But when this came out, it was, like, ahhh. On the album cover she had her hair all tied up, and she had African attire on, sitting in front of the church."

On "Mary Don't You Weep," Ms. Franklin at first sounds serene — "We're going to review the story of the two sisters, Mary and Martha," she begins — and then the choir starts applying pressure over a slow tempo, making its refrain eerily quiet, occasionally bursting out to high volume.

"Listen to the backgrounds," Ms. Reeves said, and she started banging her hand on the table to the one-two-three of the chorus's clapping. Ms. Franklin enters into a complex series of actions with the band and the choir, half rehearsed, half spontaneous. She invokes Lazarus three times; the third time she hollers, and the choir goes off like a siren.

"It's the spirit," Ms. Reeves said. "It's what she knew about. For the people in the congregation it's a statement of faith and belief. But it's also that whole thing of 'Let's gather around, and I'm going to tell you this amazing story.'"

This is gospel music straight up and down, though. Listening to Ms. Franklin's phrasing and the pacing of her emotional involvement, does Ms. Reeves get lessons that she can apply to, say, "How High the Moon"?

"Oh, absolutely," she said. "It's timing. It's that thing that just makes your spirit rise — that ability to really savor words and savor a story."

Ms. Reeves likes talking about music that isn't specific to one generation. "The majority of the stuff I listened to, my parents listened to — until I started listening to Parliament-Funkadelic," she said.

She next chose a track from the 1964 recording "Sam Cooke at the Copa," another taste she shared with her mother and stepfather. It was the medley of "Try a Little Tenderness," "(I Love You) For Sentimental Reasons" and "You Send Me," and it was as much vamping as song playing. As with the Aretha Franklin record, Cooke constantly turns to

talking-through-singing to engage his audience through transitions. This was a trick Ms. Reeves learned early on, as a performer in high school, especially with her uncle, a bassist with the Denver Symphony who played jazz at his Unitarian Church, and in club dates with the pianist Gene Harris, who moved to Denver when she was a high school junior. She hated the spaces between songs, and she needed to figure out what to do about them.

At first Cooke sounds as if he's stalling: "Oh I never, never/I never, never, never, never, never treat you wrong darling," he sings.

He frames these vamps as meta-songs: He's singing them to the men in the audience, he says, because men "have a tendency to neglect the ladies." And as he sings he puts the lyrics in quotation marks, recasting them as mollifying speeches men can deliver to their women. He improvises through the vamping, and he cues the band when he's ready to enter the song. "And also, you have to tell her, 'Darling, you send me,'" he sings, conversationally. "I wouldn't tell you if I didn't mean it — that works," he jokes. "You thrill me, honest you do."

Why is that performance such an ideal for Ms. Reeves? It could be considered Cooke just doing business, running through teasers on the way to a surer set-piece. "Because he's standing right on the edge," she answered. "He's thinking, he's forming the words in his mouth. I can tell, because I've been there."

There were other reasons too. "He's so classy. Yeah, that whole idea was you go out onstage and you entertain. You don't bring that other craziness. You bring your joy, and you tell them stories."

"And he's communicating to the band vocally when to start each song," she added. We went back to a few moments just before the band begins "Try a Little Tenderness." "He just cued them," she said, then pointed out another critical moment, just before "You Send Me," where some flutes create a kind of path to the song's entry.

How do we know that in some cases the band isn't cueing him? "Well, in that last case — maybe, I don't know," she said. "You'd have to see it. But that's all part of gospel singing, cueing. And I really think he was in control."

On the outside Ms. Reeves would seem to have little in common with Shirley Horn, who loved slow tempos and nearly whispered her songs. Ms. Reeves chose to listen to "Here's to Life," from Horn's 1992 record of the same name. Horn was a passionate singer, but tough and concise, with a kind of Bogart sibilance. She played piano as well, using those harmonies as an extension of her voice. As we listened, Ms. Reeves copied the tiniest details of the vocal performance: the little "mm" added to the end of the line "so give it all you got" in the first verse; the tiny, sharp intake of breath after the line "and all that's good get better," toward the end.

"If you broke it down, you could say it was her phrasing," Ms. Reeves said. "But it's beyond phrasing. It's breathing life into an inanimate object. The first time she says, 'Here's to love,' she pulls back. She makes it very tender and simple. The second time she says, 'Here's to love,' the 'love' is bigger. She has this picture into something. Shirley does that. Nina Simone does that. Carmen McRae does that. If they say 'love' in a certain way, they can mean it sarcastically, or like they're passionately in love with you, and you'll understand it.

"When you listen to her you start to understand what the voice is," she continued. "When I'm working with students, I ask them, putting a 'great voice' at the bottom of the list, what do you think makes a great singer? It's obvious with her, and with Aretha, that it's your spirit."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/20/arts/music/20reev.html?th&emc=th>

April 23, 2007

MUSIC REVIEW | DIANNE REEVES

## Singer and Song Fly High Together

By [STEPHEN HOLDEN](#)

Of how many pop and jazz singers can it be said that as soon as they open their mouths, you can rest in complete confidence that every note will be hit squarely in the middle? From a position of such security, the singer can then go on to play with pitch, dipping and bending notes and adding filigree, but always with the ear and discipline of a musician who knows that a quarter-tone deviation is exactly 0.25, no more, no less.

Sarah Vaughan had that kind of musicality, and so does Dianne Reeves, who gave four concerts this weekend at the Allen Room in Frederick P. Rose Hall. Although Ms. Reeves makes a mighty sound, it is only distantly related to the kind of gospel in a which a performer becomes carried away. Ms. Reeves doesn't. Like Vaughan, she has the resources of an opera singer who has chosen jazz. Her voice is clear and robust; it is an instrument that celebrates itself through its sheer power. As she performed with her trio — Billy Childs on piano, Reginald Veal on bass and Gregory Hutchinson on drums — at Friday's early show, you had the sense of a classical singer communing with a chamber group on a high musical plane.

The other great influence on Ms. Reeves is Betty Carter, whose angular, tonal improvisations went much farther into the ozone than does Ms. Reeves, whose scatting never loses sight of the song under examination. Shying away from the abstract, she understands that the frequently misunderstood and misused concept of scat doesn't mean supplying doodly-doodly-doo filler that sounds jazzy. It means stretching a song into the realm where the voice becomes a jazz instrument, in her case most often a trumpet, and inventing her own instrumental solos. She does it with such skill and taste that you never have the feeling of the singer's wandering into a no man's land. Her improvisations add meaning and a deeper sense of emotional connection.

Her ambitious first set on Friday leaned toward bossa nova, with Jobim's "Triste" and "Once I Loved," both given full-bodied articulation. The elegant, percussive song "A Child Is Born" churned with African clicks and beats. [Leonard Cohen's](#) "Suzanne" became a mystical fantasia built around Mr. Child's splaying keyboard.

The set ended with McCoy Tyner's ballad "You Taught My Heart to Sing," a love song that Ms. Reeves turned into a personal expression of her relationship to music. "The miracle of you/Will last my whole life through/You're all I keep remembering/You taught my heart to sing," goes the lyric of the ballad, in which Ms. Reeves became a songbird infused with the music in the air; she slowly walked off the stage improvising in a state quiet rapture.

Since I first saw her, more than two decades ago in a club where she was introduced by [Harry Belafonte](#), Ms. Reeves has steadily developed from a shy, closed-off performer into one of the greatest living jazz singers. There was a period when it looked as if the tradition of Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday was behind us. But with the appearance of singers like Ms. Reeves, and the remarkable Lizz Wright, those shoes are beginning to be filled. Hallelujah!

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## MIAMI HERALD (ONLINE)

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### Reeves shines in Carnival Center

BY EVELYN McDONNELL  
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There was a moment in Dianne Reeves' superb concert Friday night at the Carnival Center for the Performing Arts that would have made Ebenezer Scrooge smile. It came at the end of the first set of the two-hour concert. The singer was singing *A Child Is Born*, one of several Christmas carols that shaped the set of jazz standards and Reeves' signature tunes. Suddenly her band stopped playing and Reeves began chanting in a low voice.

"No limits, no borders," she sang, while the band and the audience clapped in flamenco triplets. Asking the crowd to hold one note, Reeves scatted over, around and through it, her voice stepping briskly from octave to octave -- getting a tad out there. "One tone, one heart, one love," the 50-year-old Grammy winner sang: Sure, they were new age sentiments, but they came surprisingly and winningly wrapped in a tribal, harmolodic, free-form package.

With her strong tones, impressive range, warm style, and crackerjack band, Reeves can suck the sap out of sentiment and render old tunes reborn. There are singers whose octave acrobatics make you feel unworthy as a human being, and then there are those who share the pleasure of gift and craft with you: Reeves is a genius of the latter. She's the heir apparent to Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald, a belter with clear tones and improvisational twists.

Reeves' creative phrasing heated *One for my Baby*, finding delicious new juices in the old chestnut. She prefaced the tune with the story of how she sang it for the movie *Good Night, and Good Luck*. The girlish wink and nod with which she described working on the set with George Clooney made the John S. and James L. Knight Concert Hall seem intimate, almost like a family gathering.

Reeves talked about the importance of family, of how the stories we learn at the kitchen table can be the fabric of our society. The Colorado native dedicated two songs to her blizzard-socked home: *Let It Snow* and *I'll Be Home for Christmas*.

Reeves surrounds herself with musicians who can play bop, bossa nova, soul, African and pop music. The quartet sounded great in the hall, which was half-filled at 1,100 people but felt somehow full. The crowd gave Reeves standing ovations at the end of both sets and brought her back for one genuine encore, before letting her go fly home.

February 7, 2006

## For a Period Film, a Serving of Lean, Smoky Jazz

By NATE CHINEN

It should come as news to no one that the front-runner for best jazz vocal album in this year's Grammy Awards is an intimate standards session that evokes the sound of the 1950's. Isn't that often the case? What's interesting about the current favorite is that it comes with a period picture attached, the [George Clooney](#) film "Good Night, and Good Luck." The soundtrack is the latest effort from Dianne Reeves, a singer who has been unbeatable in recent awards seasons.

"Good Night, and Good Luck," about Edward R. Murrow's broadcast battle with Senator [Joseph R. McCarthy](#), takes place almost entirely at CBS television headquarters in 1953 and 1954. The powerful but mellow alto of Ms. Reeves wafts through the film, as ubiquitous and atmospheric as the smoke from Murrow's cigarettes. Ms. Reeves appears on-screen as a CBS contract singer; in the spirit of cinéma vérité, she and her band recorded much of the soundtrack in character, while cameras rolled. The result, oddly enough, is the leanest, most instantly gratifying album of her career.

"I had to say, 'O.K., this is what I have to work with,'" Ms. Reeves said in a recent phone interview. "How do I make this the best it can possibly be? It makes you go inward and find the subtleties." She was referring not only to the logistics of the film, but also to the singing style of the period, which required restraint. "I have a big voice," she said. "I could have had more complex music and been happy. When I perform that music onstage, it takes on a different character."

Ms. Reeves, who turns 50 this year, has blazed a stubbornly circuitous trail through the jazz mainstream. Her recording career, spanning a dozen Blue Note releases since 1987, has included detours into R&B, fusion and world music. "People would say, 'It's too pop for jazz, too jazzy for pop,'" she said. "So I've always been in a kind of middle place, but that was the music that made me feel connected."

Ms. Reeves won her first Grammy in 2000 for "In the Moment," a live recording that captures the breadth of her eclecticism, complete with semiautobiographical exhortations and Southern Hemisphere grooves. She won again in 2001 for "The Calling," an elaborate tribute with strings to Sarah Vaughan, her most significant vocal influence. Her third award was in 2003 for "A Little Moonlight," an exquisitely focused standards album and her finest recorded work. It was the first time a singer had won a Grammy for three consecutive releases, in any genre.

The "Good Night, and Good Luck" soundtrack, on Concord Records, could be seen as a logical next step for Ms. Reeves: it's even sparser than "A Little Moonlight," with a similar emphasis on standard fare. The soundtrack's simple clarity has resonated with an especially broad audience, as Ms. Reeves noticed on her most recent tour. (A straight standards repertory, paradoxically, has become the ultimate crossover tool for contemporary jazz singers.) Since its late September release, the album has sold roughly 40,000 copies; that's barely a blip by pop standards, but solid for jazz and almost as many as "A Little Moonlight" or "The Calling" to date.

But Ms. Reeves describes the soundtrack as a discrete project, not a hint of things to come. She has plans to record her next Blue Note album this summer, after a six-week European tour. (Look for it among the nominees at the 2008 Grammy Awards.)

Assessing this year's race, Ms. Reeves places emphasis on the quality of her competition, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Luciana Souza, Nnenna Freelon and Tierney Sutton. "I would love to win," Ms. Reeves said, "I'm not going to lie about that, but I'm really excited about the category that I'm in. They're all great singers. I have their records, I've seen them, I know most of them."

Whoever takes home the award tomorrow night, Ms. Reeves will have reasons for celebrating. "The music and all of the things in the universe are clicking," she said. "I always felt confident, but not like this. I don't even know how to describe it. I just feel very easy and able and — I don't know — mature."

Dianne Reeves

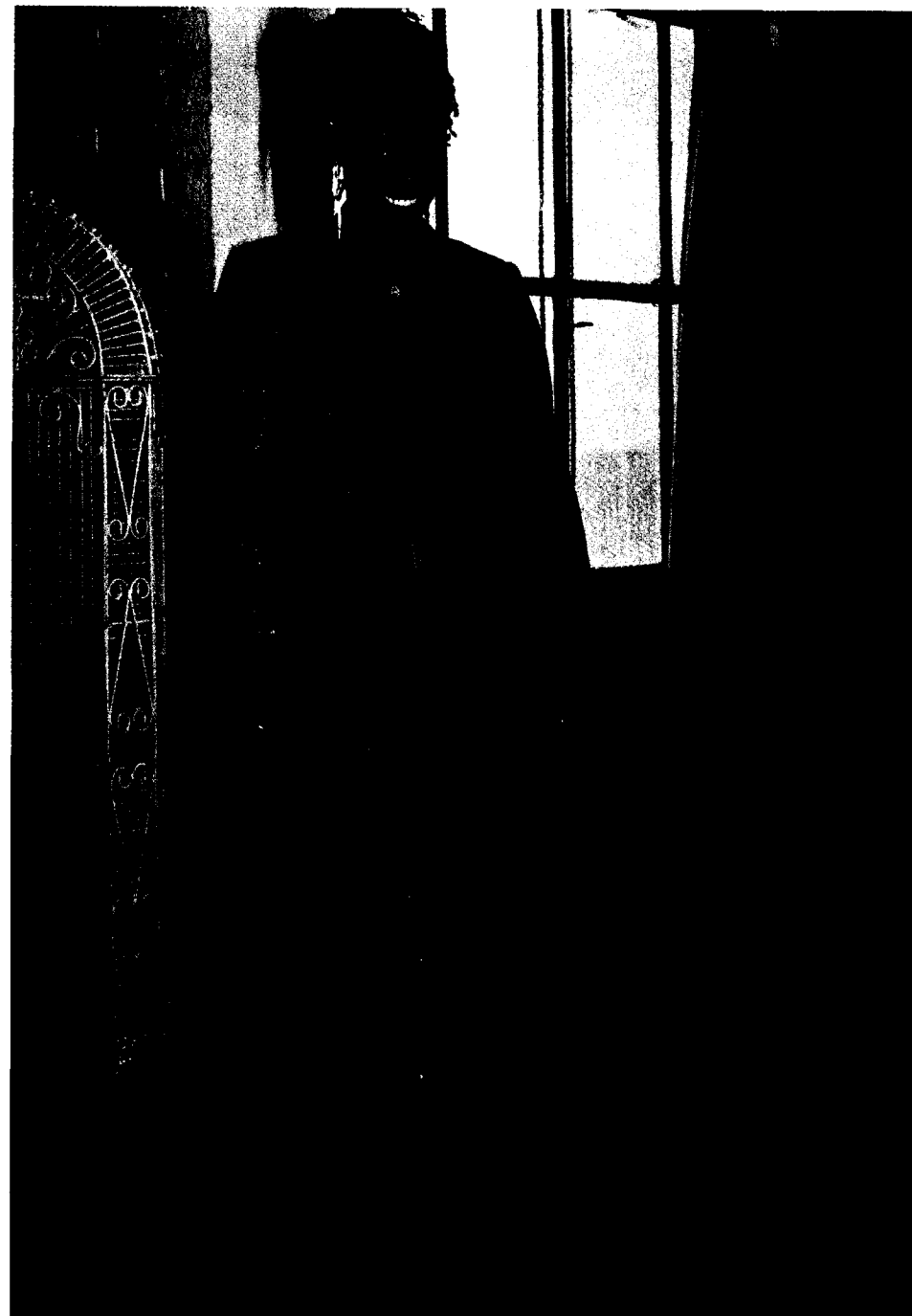
# JazzTimes

AMERICA'S JAZZ MAGAZINE

# Amazing Dianne Reeves answers the calling. Grace

Applying Darwinian principles to jazz singing, Dianne Reeves represents the survival of the fittest. Unravel her musical DNA and you'd discover the dexterity of her hero Sarah Vaughan, the disciplined integrity of Carmen McRae and the effusive warmth of Ella Fitzgerald. You'd detect traces of such disparate mentors and teachers as Clark Terry, Billy Childs, Sergio Mendes and Harry Belafonte. You'd find familial echoes of her bassist uncle Charles Barrell and her cousin George Duke. In a career that spans three decades, the 46-year-old Grammy winner has combined all such influences to create a jazz-world-pop-bop synthesis that is the bellwether for such genre-hopping acolytes as Norah Jones, Jane Monheit and Lizz Wright.

By Christopher Loudon  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE



As with Bobby McFerrin (one of the few artists who rivals her multiplicity), critics continue to be stumped by Reeves' professional legerdemain, often damning her for the very assets that make her unique. Chatting over breakfast during an early summer concert stop in Buffalo, N.Y., Reeves recalls a particularly painful moment of journalistic mean-spiritedness. "It was several years ago in Arizona. A reviewer called me up and I was very honest with him, musically speaking, about a lot of different things. His story appeared the next day and the headline was 'Raking Reeves.' At the end of it he said that as long as people continue to listen to people like Dianne Reeves, Al Jarreau, Bobby McFerrin and Manhattan Transfer jazz will be on the decline. I never had an article hurt me so badly because I knew that my jazz foundation enabled me to absorb a world of

music. I knew that one of my talents was my versatility and I loved that in my life. Because of that versatility I've had the opportunity to share music with all sorts of different people on all sorts of different levels."

For years afterward, Reeves avoided her own press. "Good or bad," she says, "I just would not read it; I just didn't want to know." She's since grown philosophic about the slings, arrows and bouquets tossed her way. "Some of the comments were pretty hard—*really* hard—but I just had to get through it. Now my attitude is, 'This is what I'm doing; take it or leave it.'"

Projecting a Zenlike complacency similar to that of her friend and sometime collaborator Roy Hargrove ("He doesn't think music," she enthuses. "He *is* music"), Reeves seems enviably contented. Though healthily pragmatic and perhaps overly self-effacing, she is—on stage, on disc and in person—simply who she is. No pretense, no ego, no grandiosity, no games. Professionally speaking, things have never been rosier. Her 16-year, 11-album relationship with Blue Note is one of trust and mutual respect. It is, she says, "a place where they really love the music and love the artists. I can call up [Blue Note president] Bruce Lundvall and we don't even have to discuss music. We can talk about a million other things, which is really nice. The biggest thing, though, that makes artists want to be there is the freedom to have yourself documented as you change and grow. I can be myself without ever having to compromise my music."

Her latest release, the misty, all-acoustic, all-standards collection *A Little Moonlight*, was motivated by "my love for my band"—pianist-arranger Peter Martin, bass player Reuben Rogers and drummer Gregory Hutchinson. "We came together about a year and a half ago. All three of

them worked with Betty Carter and really learned to both accompany *and* inspire. I don't ever look at them as a backup band. We're all equal contributors to the whole sound. I really wanted to capture the love, the intimacy we share. And their energy is so great. I've been so blown away by them, so inspired in my soul, that it caused me to go to the gym and lose 50 pounds just so I could keep up."

A gorgeously romantic compilation, *Moonlight* was produced by legendary diva architect Arif Mardin, who aptly describes the experience as "truly a magical adventure. We really had a fabulous time, and I think the album, so intimate and heartfelt, is one of her best. I'm known to add a lot of stuff to my productions—horns and strings and such—but the power

on this album comes from a three-person rhythm section playing so well and at such an energy level that they sound like a big orchestra. And, of course, there's her singing! Even her scatting, which sounds like a tenor sax, has so much meaning. Unlike a lot of other jazz singers, there's no throwaway. Every note she sings has relevance. I can tell you I think she's going to get another Grammy for her performance."

Reeves' continent-jumping touring itinerary remains jam-packed through 2004. Despite the breakneck schedule, she's signed on as the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association's Creative Chair for Jazz and is calling on such esteemed colleagues as Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett and Wynton Marsalis to shape a series of performances at the Walt Disney Concert Hall that she promises will be "a little bit of heaven for the jazz enthusiast." And just to add a layer of icing to an already sweet year, this past June she and Aerosmith's Steven Tyler (surely one of the most intriguingly odd musical couples imaginable) were recipients of honorary Berklee doctorates.

Though refreshingly taciturn about personal matters (no fan of kiss 'n' tell publicity, her private life, centered around relatives and friends in her adopted home town of Denver, is private), Reeves is happy—indeed eager—to share family history in song. Longtime fans recognize the sepia-tinted "Better Days" as a pillar of her early career. Though also known as "The Grandma Song," it pays broader homage to all the matriarchal figures—grandmother, mother, elder sister, aunts and great aunts—who, after the death of Reeves' father in 1958, defined her childhood and adolescence.

"Even though," she remembers, "my mother remarried and my stepfather was wonderful, the family was entirely run by women. All of them had a significant influence on shaping my perspective because they were very strong and fiercely independent. When tragedy would strike, they'd deal with it and move on. They gave me my independence and my security, and taught me to move forward no matter what."

Reeves picks up the autobiographical thread in "The First Five Chapters" (included on her live, Grammy-winning *In the Moment* from 2000), a rich slice of self-analysis adapted from the Portia Nelson poem "Autobiography in Five Chapters." In the prelude, a determined 18-year-old Reeves decides to set off on her own in pursuit of a singing career and debates the relative merits of New York and L.A.:

*I could starve and be cold in the East/Or starve and be hot on the West Coast.*

Los Angeles won. "The biggest reason," she says, "was that my cousin, George Duke, was there. Also, back then the music that really rang for me was the early fusion music. I remember dancing to *Bitches Brew* when nobody was home. I'd have it up loud and just let my imagination run wild. It seemed like most of the fusion musicians were in L.A., and I wanted to go out there and see it and be in it."

Arriving in California, she joined the Latin fusion group Caldera and then linked up with pianist Billy Childs. "Billy heard me sing with Caldera and wanted me to record his 'Lullaby' but," she recalls with a giggle, "didn't think he could afford me because he thought I was really big time! At the same time, a friend of mine said, 'There's this piano player I really think you oughta know' and gave me Billy's number. Six months went by. Finally I called him and said, 'Hi, this is Dianne Reeves, and I'm calling to see if I can get piano lessons from you.' The lessons never happened. Instead, they formed a musical partnership that would last 10 years. "What made it interesting," she says, "is that we were both growing—both out there experiencing music. Every time we came together we'd share what we'd experienced. We had this band [the boldly progressive Night Flight] and we arranged songs that were way out there, taking the music as far as we could. We worked at this club called the Comeback Inn out in Venice Beach, and they paid us by passing the hat. But it was cool because it was a chance to really find our voices." As she explained to Herb Wong in the liner notes for *The Palo Alto Sessions* CD (an anthology of Reeves' first two albums, recorded in 1982 and 1985 and produced by Wong), "Billy gave me license to go anywhere musically.... There was telepathy between Billy and me—we read each other's minds, and my ears were broadened as a result."

Around the time she met Childs, Reeves got a call from a pal in Sergio Mendes' band who told her, "He's looking for a new girl singer. You should come in and audition." Well, when I got there, the first thing he asked was, 'Are you good with languages?' I'd never sung in any other language but I'd learned "How Insensitive" from Flora Purim's *Stories to Tell*, so I said, 'I know "Insensatez" in Portuguese.' He was impressed! I got up there, he started playing, I started singing, and I could see that he was laughing so hard that tears were practically coming out of his eyes. Still, he hired me. Only later did his wife tell me, 'You really butchered our language!'"

Touring the world with Mendes was, says Reeves, "simply amazing. I had just two weeks to learn 13 songs in Portuguese, but you do that sort of crazy stuff when you're young. Sergio was a remarkable person. Wherever we went he would know every head of state, and he would always sing a song in the local language. Even when we went to Israel, he sang in Yiddish. He was beyond the performance, always providing insights into different cultures and explaining the evolution of the music he loved."

After a year or so with Mendes, Reeves learned that world music pioneer and global goodwill ambassador Harry Belafonte was on the lookout for an African-American singer for his touring troupe. "He brought me to New York," she recalls, "and introduced me to this wonderful band of musicians from every-

I  
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dancing to  
*Bitches  
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where—Caribbean roots, African roots, European roots. We'd all get together in a workshop setting and work out the arrangements. The musicians opened up my world with rhythms that I'd never experienced in my life, and we'd create these wonderful arrangements of everything from Bob Marley songs to South African songs about the Zambezi River." Equally valuable to Reeves was her exposure to Belafonte the international humanitarian. "I remember we went to East Berlin, and it was the first time I heard him in a more political arena. I knew his connection with the Civil Rights Movement but had only heard him sing and never heard him speak. It was so moving. He wanted us to have a front-row-center seat to see what was happening in the world. It was an amazing experience."

In 1987, good fortune again smiled on Reeves. Lundvall caught her appearance on the all-star TV tribute *Echoes of Ellington* and invited her to join the recently resuscitated Blue Note label as its first female vocalist. With Childs and Duke on hand for moral and professional support (the former served as musical director for her first eight Blue Note outings; the latter has produced six of them), Reeves' trademark eclecticism shone through from the very beginning. On her eponymous Blue Note debut she led the likes of Herbie Hancock and Freddie Hubbard on a musical journey that extends from the sweet nostalgia of "Better Days" and silken majesty of "I Got It Bad" to the Latin-tinged sophistication of "Sky Islands" (a holdover from her Caldera days) and funkified shimmer of "That's All." Other critic-confounding, audience-pleasing efforts followed: the soulful *Never Too Far*, the dynamically multinational *Quiet After the Storm*, the richly pop-oriented *Bridges*, the gorgeously romantic *That Day*.

Arguably, Reeves is at her absolute best when championing her idols. In 1996 she and Clark Terry assembled a sterling who's who for an aptly titled *The Grand Encounter*. Bringing together Phil Woods, Harry "Sweets" Edison, Toots Thielemans, Kenny Barron, Al Grey, James Moody and Joe Williams (who teamed with Reeves for sublime renditions of "Let Me Love You" and "Tenderly") was, she says, "something I wanted to do because when I was just starting out and working with Clark he made me very conscious of who these geniuses were. I saw it as my chance to share with them like they



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sing as a  
teenager.

shared with me. There's only one thing I missed out on. In between takes and during the breaks it was nothing but stories. They were just laughing and reminiscing and having a good time, but for me their stories were unbelievable. I wanted to run a tape, but it didn't happen. Now that so many of them—Al, Sweets, Joe—are gone, I really wish I'd captured all those stories."

Five years later, Reeves, "fulfilled a dream born when I first heard Sarah Vaughan sing as a teenager." Backed by a 42-piece band, the singer whom esteemed vocal critic James Gavin says "shares many of Vaughan's gifts: a gleaming, pitch-perfect

voice, a multioctave range; and a harmonic sense that takes her on some remarkable flights of fancy," honored every phase of Sassy's long, multifarious career on *The Calling*. A stunning tribute, highlighted by Reeves and Childs' celebratory "I Remember Sarah" and rivaled only by Carmen McRae's *Sarah: Dedicated to You*, it earned Reeves her second Grammy.

Journeying back to Portia Nelson's "Five Chapters," the serene, centered Reeves believes she's successfully navigated the first five and has embarked on a self-styled Chapter Six. "All my life," she muses, "I have, without knowing, swum upstream. There were things I dreamed of that did happen, things I dreamed of that didn't, and things I'd never even

thought of that entered my life and were wonderful. Finally, I started taking notice of the fact that everybody has their own plan. So, Chapter Six involves turning around in the stream, going where the stream wants me to go and feeling a lot more peace in my life. There have been a lot of things in the past few months that have been very tragic. It's been a time for me to reflect and reach deeper into my soul and use the strengths I've learned from my mother and grandmother and aunts and sister to think positively as I move forward."

And how, in the spirit of the sultry "Is That All There Is?" that Reeves performed on *Sex and the City*, would she like her *final* chapter to read? "Ooooh," she ponders. "I guess the biggest thing would be that I kept my course, stayed true to myself and, somewhere along the way, inspired at least one other person to maintain their focus and keep their eye on the prize." JT

# Dianne Reeves keeps focus on jazz

BY KIMBERLY DEMBUCHA  
 Valley Press Staff Writer

**A** nonconformist to the core, salty jazz songbird Dianne Reeves brings to the originality and distinctiveness of jazz.

"The thing that I love about this music is the ability to find your own voice," Reeves said during a recent

phone interview from her home in Denver. "It's all about finding what your own unique qualities are and developing them, staying true to your self."

"Jazz is such a unique expression — the music is very much in the moment. The magic that happens between the musicians and myself depends on the reaction of the audience. It's a very interactive kind of

musical style." Reeves said. "I like many artists. Reeves, who will be at the Lancaster Performing Arts Center on Wednesday, Jan. 22, has enjoyed a resurgence of popularity as young, college-aged music aficionados have become interested in jazz."

"That's where I was during my 20s discovering jazz," Reeves said. "(Jazz) is sobling new, but it's new and different to (young adults) and that's why they're excited about it."

Much of Reeves' love for jazz came as a teenager, with the help of a tutoring uncle and a stack of Sarah Vaughan records.

"My uncle gave me a bunch of records to listen to when I was singing with the high school band," Reeves recalled. "I heard (Vaughan's) album with Michel Legrand and more than anything I was struck by the sound of her voice — it's color, range, the places it went to create feelings."

"I didn't know a voice could do all that. I'd never heard a voice like that, that could soar that was so rich and deep and beautiful. It was like magic. (Vaughan) changed my way of listening and all of a sudden I had a place to reach in my own singing."

At 19 years old, the Detroit native met Vaughan and was forever changed.

"I didn't even know it was her," Reeves recalled. "There was this woman singing on a radio that I decided to talk to. She asked about me and I told her I was a singer. She asked who my favorites were and I told her I loved Sarah Vaughan. She didn't say anything, but after that evening there she was onstage and I just about died."

In February 2001, Reeves released "The Calling: Celebrating Sarah Vaughan."

Learned from Sarah and Abbey Carrer that you have to have your

## Concert details

**WHEN:** 8 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 22  
**WHERE:** Lancaster Performing Arts Center, 750 West Lancaster Blvd.  
**TICKETS:** \$36, orchesras, \$50  
 balcony; tickets can be purchased at the LPAC box office online at [www.lpac.org](http://www.lpac.org) or by calling (661) 723-5950

own approach, your own concept," Reeves said. "Even though I didn't emulate her, Sarah was there at the beginning for me, but I moved on and was influenced by a range of other people over the years. But now I feel so confident in my own voice, that I can fully celebrate Sarah's inspiration and spirit."

After more than two decades in the recording business and 13 albums, Reeves is grateful for the freedom jazz allows her to focus on the art of making music, not record sales like many of the up-and-coming pop artists.

"It's unfortunate," Reeves said. "Some of these new artists will release an album and sell 5 million copies. Their next album will only sell 2 million copies and the record label thinks there is a problem. That's not two million people who want to hear their music."

Throughout her career, which has earned her multiple Grammy nominations — two of which she lost — and countless other accolades, Reeves has made an effort to keep her focus on her music.

"Making records is an opportunity to express who I am," Reeves explained. "For me, it's about the art. It's about the music." ■



Dianne Reeves

JAZZ REVIEW

# Dianne Reeves a superior talent

By Howard Reich  
Reich was critic

of Grammy darling Norah Pender had been playing Orchestras last over the weekend, she would have been blown clear off the stage.

For the great singer who performed on Friday night showed a generally audience what real jazz singing is all about. There was a sense of the cooling and slighting that won Jones multiple Grammys last week, nor any of the standard crooning that has defined such Jones clones as Diana Krall, Jane Monheit and the like.

Indeed, the mighty Dianne Reeves unfurled majestic lines, gorgeous high notes, sonorous ballads, sensual ballads, and high-flying bebop. Her name with the kind of virtuosity one does not often encounter among younger generations of singers.

The woman was in her element from the outset, proving that even a somewhat cheery mood can be transformed into a vehicle for first-rate jazz improvisation. It didn't take more than a few phrases of the original, before Reeves was producing some of the deepest, darkest blues tinging this side of Cassandra Wilson.

Reeves here were as carefully sculpted as they were freely improvised, her phrases rising from a husky low register to a piercing top with apparent ease. Judging by audience response, Reeves probably made her greatest impact during "You Go to My Head," in a direct with guest Roy Hargrove as they joined lines of her own that by last rhythm and baroque



grove clearly was facing an impressive of comparable creativity and technique. The result was a performance that certainly passed profound music-making and general comedy with the few female vocalists these days sing ballads as poetically as Reeves did in "Skyline." Her lines here were as carefully sculpted as they were freely improvised, her phrases rising from a husky low register to a piercing top with apparent ease. Judging by audience response, Reeves probably made her greatest impact during "You Go to My Head," in a direct with guest Roy Hargrove as they joined lines of her own that by last rhythm and baroque

technique can intertwine, in a melody of blues tunes, including "Rocks in My Bed." Reeves produced some of the deepest, darkest blues tinging this side of Cassandra Wilson. Reeves here were as carefully sculpted as they were freely improvised, her phrases rising from a husky low register to a piercing top with apparent ease. Judging by audience response, Reeves probably made her greatest impact during "You Go to My Head," in a direct with guest Roy Hargrove as they joined lines of her own that by last rhythm and baroque

virtually every time she sang as the music progressed. Reeves here were as carefully sculpted as they were freely improvised, her phrases rising from a husky low register to a piercing top with apparent ease. Judging by audience response, Reeves probably made her greatest impact during "You Go to My Head," in a direct with guest Roy Hargrove as they joined lines of her own that by last rhythm and baroque

# The New York Times

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, AUGUST 10, 2002

## JAZZ REVIEW

### *A Big Voice, With Nothing Held Back*

By BEN RATLIFF

Jazz singers these days seem more likely to find their useful information in the restraint and mystery of bossa nova than in the unapologetic splendor of, say, Sarah Vaughan. Maybe it's because they feel that reticent music implies modernity more quickly. If so, Dianne Reeves is their opposite: she's only lightly concerned with reticence. She has an enormous voice and an enormous talent, and she offers it up to stun her audience.

On Tuesday night at the Village Vanguard, where she plays through tomorrow night with a backing trio, she was noticeably loud for the room and sometimes seemed as if she were performing in a thousand-seat hall. But she never exaggerated her body gestures; she was just turning her klieg-light voice.

It's Ms. Reeves's first-ever week at the Vanguard, which remains an in-school honor for any jazz musician, and the extra measure of pride is clear in the performance. Her band, made up of the pianist Peter Martin, the bassist Reuben Rogers and the drummer Greg Hutchinson — they've been playing together for about six months and will soon record — is, compared with older, slicker ensembles, New York with a vengeance. No exotic percussion player, no world-music pretention, just hard-nosed swing. Still, she isn't giving herself license to foam or even interact with improving musicians Betty Carter-style: this was meticulous, mapped-out mu-

She doesn't let you forget how much craft goes into her singing or the overall performance. "You Go to My Head" was a dramatically quiet set piece, opening with only voice and piano, and when she sang the word "you" for the last time, it was a lovely 10-note string, leading into a bowed-bass-ending flourish. No area of "Lullaby of Birdland" was tossed off: for her scat solo, the ensemble dropped out save for Mr. Rogers, and then with every subsequent four bars the instruments jumped in and grew more forceful together.

In a blues, she accented every microtonal note in a fast run, like a segmented melisma. (It was above all a demonstration of throat muscles, but each note was true; her intonation is fabulous.) At one point between songs she recalled being in a high school choir when she discovered Sarah Vaughan and that you could, if you wanted to, smuggle some Vaughan-like blues runs into Bach's "Magnificat." She sang it; it was impressive, of course.

And it was a lead-in to her earnest, self-actualizing side, in original songs like "Endangered Species" and "Nine," claiming the power of womanhood and one's inner child. "I am a gift to the world!" she sang loudly at the peak of "Endangered

Species." And though one can admire her for saying so, it's clear even from a scat solo how she feels about herself. What's best about Ms. Reeves is what's best about so many skilled high-octane performers: that she respects the audience enough to give them well-wrought music, that she transforms self-regard into generosity.