

DIANA TORTI

FEARLESS

Authentic. Brave. Free. To me, these are the three adjectives that best describe Italian singer, improviser and composer Diana Torti and her music. Her latest album "Fearless" - due to be released on April 10th - is a confident statement of her musical bravery.

A collection of compositions to encourage the listener to turn their own fears into fuel that can make a change and help to let things go. An engaging, clever and beautifully constructed work for people in the know, who will appreciate a vocal freedom that harks back, first and foremost, to American singer and poet Jeanne Lee and that not many singers achieve this easily.

To Lee, Diana dedicated her 2019 release "On a Cloud", nominated amongst the best vocal jazz albums of 2019 by The New York City Jazz Record and Jazz Views. The album immediately stands out as a brilliant test of bravery and inner reflection, and it's evidence of her extensive research of the many expressive possibilities; through sounds and vocal improvisation but also of her musical background that - quoting Diana's bio - varies from "the evocative atmosphere of ancient music, the warmth and improvisation of jazz music, the aesthetics of bel canto and the daring singing of contemporary repertoire".

From an artist who is devoting her career to the search for freedom of expression and beauty, "Fearless" comes to the world at the right moment in time. It's both the energy boost and the meditative caress that we all need now.



Photo by **MONIKA S JAKUBOWSKA**

GSLs: Who inspired you the most at the beginning of your career and why?

I started singing in my teens. I've always needed role models to inspire my journey over the years. Early on, legends like Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan, to name a few, ignited a strong passion for jazz singing in me. I wanted to listen to and absorb as much of their language and art as possible. They've helped me make those influences my own and go beyond them to find my own unique style. While my curiosity remains as strong as ever, my focus has shifted over time. I've become drawn to artists who blend musical artistry with strong social commitment. Abbey Lincoln for example, whom I absolutely adore. However, the real turning point was discovering Jeanne Lee. There was a further transformation that has strongly influenced my vocal exploration from that moment on. Broader space for improvisation, a profound sense of expressive freedom combined with an awareness of the intimate fusion between artistic beauty and the beauty of the human person that this great artist was able to express.

GSLs: What do you consider your biggest achievements in life and what are you most proud of in your career as a woman in the music business?

At this stage of my life, I recognize that I've always strived to improve over time, despite the difficulties. You have to find the right balance between being yourself, pursuing your own path, and adapting to change and the unexpected without losing yourself. Over time, I'm learning more and more not to be afraid to express myself. It's not a given, and I consider myself a very lucky person. There are places where even freedom of speech or being is denied. My music is an expression of the feelings and experiences of the moment. For me, it's essential, and the two aspects are merged; one ties into the other. When you compose or perform,

the music you make is influenced and conveys all of this. To return to Lee, for example, I'm very proud to have dedicated a project to her with my 2019 album, "On a Cloud" (SLAM). I wanted to let myself go with the sound I felt without worrying about style, context, or whether I was right in what I was doing. And I'm proud of the fact that I felt authentic and free like never before, full of myself, despite a market that often suffocates this authenticity by forcing us to follow clichés or trends just because they're imposed on us from outside.

GSLs: Tell us about your latest release, "Fearless". Where does the inspiration for the music come from? Is there a specific message that you wish to share with it?

My upcoming album is called "Fearless" (Tambora Music). It features original music composed by Sabino de Bari, my partner in life and art. I always find myself in great harmony with his elegant and captivating melodies. They inspired me with lyrics I'm very fond of. They are songs of courage tied to personal experiences, life stories, and emotional bonds close to my heart and that taught me the meaning of not being afraid. It's an album that crossed two years of my life, during which many things changed personally, and I had to deal with some significant separations. It was a journey that brought together so many contrasting and intense emotions. The thread that held everything together was precisely a fearless attitude. It's also the first album I've recorded as a quartet. In addition to Sabino on classical guitar, there are Andrea Colella on double bass and Francesco De Rubeis on drums. They have enriched the tracks with their skill as great instrumentalists.

GSLs: Are there any tracks on your album(s) that are particularly dear to you and why?

Oh, I love the whole album! All tracks are part of my life and express some of my

deepest feelings, they meant the world to me. If I must choose a few, I would say "Montmartre Café", which represents my first trip to Paris. The trees in the little square seem to question my astonishment, and I tell them all about my emotion at breathing in the atmosphere that embraced some of the greatest innovative artists and painters of 20th-century history. It's the second single that will be out on March 20th.

Then the first single out a few weeks ago, "The Hawk's Hills". It tells of the determination in pursuing one's dreams. It is the story of a hawk that manages to fly towards the hills it has always longed to reach, transforming its limitations into driving force and vitality.

GSLs: What advice would you give to someone who worries about stereotypes and labels or to someone who is struggling to take the steps forward towards what they really want to do and/or be?

Very difficult question, I can answer by sharing my personal experience. I've been working for years to build the resistance to face situations that put me to the test, precisely for what you're talking about. Feeling inadequate, not good enough, or even unsuitable for a role or situation happens to me almost daily because of labels or stereotypes. Clearly, years and experience have helped me to better manage these events. For example, as a woman, I already find myself daily facing impossibilities or limitations due to a culture that still considers women inferior to men. Moreover, I am not in my twenties anymore, think of the combination of the two in current years! The jazz industry itself shares these stereotypes. It's a cultural issue: until we recognize a universal human equality starting from the birth of each of us, we won't accept that being different doesn't mean having a limitation or deficiency. And here we could talk

about this for hours... recent political and economic developments are highlighting significant steps backwards toward the recognition of even already acquired rights for women (see the abortion situation in some US states, to name one). For every small step forward, there's a step back.

Talking about it and sharing each of our stories is a piece of advice I feel I can give. Organizations like WiJM are essential and are making a huge difference in supporting female musicians experiencing this condition. We're not alone, we must repeat it out loud, and it's true!

"Don't be afraid" is perhaps a second piece of advice. It's a theme very dear to me (I dedicated my upcoming album to it). Fear feeds on fear itself and withdrawing into ourselves isolates us. This is what I felt I had to express through the songs on "Fearless", which captured a moment in my life when I was often afraid. But I had to find a way to let it go and transform it into the strength to reclaim myself. Working on the music, lyrics and the songs was the way I pulled these threads together, and as a result I felt like I was untangling a deeply rooted emotional knot.

GSLs: We hear a lot about artists struggling to keep up with a music industry that is increasingly demanding. Nowadays, it seems like artists feel more and more obliged to constantly create content and new 'products' - even if this often impacts their wellbeing - in order not to 'disappear' or for the fear of feeling like a failure and being forgotten. What do you think about this?

More than a feeling, this is a reality. In my opinion the responsibility lies with an economic and social system that oppresses our space, our time, and, in a sense, our personal history. I believe this is a general situation. Artists, being so emotionally exposed by the very nature of their

profession, are probably more vulnerable to this. It's not easy at all, and we live in a constant swing between survival and feeling overwhelmed. I believe everyone needs to analyse their own situation. There is an outside and an inside, and I think it's important to understand who is responsible for what happens, otherwise we will think we are the ones doing the wrong thing and even feel guilty for what is happening. It's important not to lose our sense of reality, to take an interest in everyday life, to remain curious, to engage and share with others, so as not to feel isolated. The meaning of life is much deeper than the logic of a marketing product; it is ourselves and our identity that we must protect and cultivate. If we make a mistake or fail at something, we will suffer a little, but then we must get up and continue our journey. If we lack this attitude, we must seek the help of an expert who can help us work on it; it must be regained. The rest is a consequence of this and represents only a part of our life. Authentic relationships with others, mutual respect, and honesty must be reclaimed. It's a continuous effort that requires perseverance and endurance. We must learn this otherwise we're at the mercy of external events, and this makes our relationship with the current industry even more complicated. It's not easy, but that's what I try to do, amidst the ups and downs that are natural for each of us.

GSLs: Is there a specific matter that you think we should talk more about? What would you suggest to sort it/ improve the situation?

More than a specific issue, I'd like us to always keep both our eyes and ears open and attentive to how things unfold around us. And then I'd like to see a movement from words to action more often, and more involvement from women and men, also those with greater visibility. Just like in life, people in the jazz community complain and condemn inequalities, stereotypes, or injustices. But just as often, when concrete

action needs to be taken, many back off for fear of losing something. So, I would like everyone to rediscover a deeper and more human sense of community, because we are all connected to each other and can bring about deeper changes together.

GSLs: What's on your 'bucket list', what are your dreams at this very moment and what are your next steps?

Professionally, I'm currently focused on the album, which will be released on April 10th. The work we must do as independent artists is huge and goes far beyond the creative process, so it's hard to think of anything else now. But in the wake of the freedom of expression we mentioned earlier, I'm very happy to be able to share my music and my vocal research. I also have a great passion for writing lyrics, which I will continue to cultivate.

The coming months will be dedicated to sharing and promoting the project. The album launch will be in Italy, in my beloved Rome on April 10th at the Arciliuto Jazz Club and on the 13th at Birrjazz in Formia, two places I deeply love. We're also working on upcoming dates in the UK this Autumn. I'll promote the new dates on my website and social media soon.

If I may return to the word "dreams" in your question, I can't help but connect it to something broader than music. In recent years, there has been a critical social and political situation that is negatively impacting our lives and undermining our history. So, a dream is for us to return to a deeper human sense of ourselves and of life in general. And I think artists have an important role in this, because they can perceive events and moments through precious lenses, capturing what is invisible to the eye and transforming it into powerful and authentic emotions, accessible to many. Maybe "Fearless" is coming out now, precisely because of this global situation.

This is a dream that I hope will not remain just a dream but will soon become a reality.



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