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DEE DEE BRIDGEWATER

Biography

Today Dee Dee is a sparkling ambassador for jazz, but she bathed in its music before she could walk: her mother played the greatest albums of Ella Fitzgerald for her, and her father was a trumpeter who taught music - to Booker Little, Charles Lloyd and George Coleman, amongst others - and who also played in the summer with Dinah Washington. It's the kind of background that leaves its mark on an adolescent, especially one who appeared solo and with a trio as soon as she was able. Dee Dee's other vocation, that of a globetrotter, reared its head when she toured the Soviet Union, in 1969, with the University of Illinois Big Band. A year later, she followed her then husband, Cecil Bridgewater, to New York. Cecil was playing with pianist Horace Silver, and Dee Dee's dream was to sing Horace's compositions one day... *Love and Peace*, (Verve), her irresistible 1994 album, was that same dream come true.

The young singer made an earth-shattering debut in New York; for four years she was the lead vocalist with the band led by Thad Jones and Mel Lewis, an early career marked by concerts and recordings with such authentic giants as Sonny Rollins, Dizzy Gillespie, Dexter Gordon, Max Roach, Roland Kirk... and also rich experiences with Norman Connors, Stanley Clarke, and Frank Foster's "Loud Minority".

Dee Dee doesn't care much for being labeled, and in 1974 she jumped at the chance to act and sing on Broadway, and later in Tokyo, London, Los Angeles and Paris, where her voice, beauty, and stage presence won her great success in *The Wiz* (a "Tony" Award for her role as Glinda, the good witch of the South), *Sophisticated Ladies*, *Lady Day* (a "Laurence Olivier" nomination for best actress), *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, *Black Ballad*, *Carmen Jazz* and *Cabaret*. In between musicals, Dee Dee returned to the jazz scene, where she continued to show as much enthusiasm as ever, appearing with a trio in clubs and then concert-halls, first in France, and then in Europe, and the USA soon afterwards. Her "Grammy" nominated *Live In Paris* album, recorded in 1987, and the Polydor release *Victims of Love*, with a contribution by Ray Charles, caught the attention of a new young audience; this was confirmed by the album *In Montreux*, which she recorded live at the 1990 Festival, but the three albums that followed sealed her reputation as a singer of immense class, three recordings that she produced herself with painstaking care, and a choice of strong, demanding material.

The first *Keeping Tradition* (Verve), was recorded in December 1992, and was devoted to great songs, most of them familiar to a jazz audience, with a superb new approach that showed a great deal of application, not to mention imagination, passion (and a few risks), on part of Dee Dee and her trio: Thierry Eliez (piano), Hein Van De Geyn (bass), and André Ceccarelli (drums). The album was rewarded in 1994 by the "Django d'Or" Award,

and a second "Grammy" nomination, followed in 1995 by *Love and Peace: A Tribute to Horace Silver* (Verve).

This recording, made in December of '94, contained 13 compositions by Silver, with lyrics he wrote especially for Dee Dee, and featured, along with her trio, the Belmondo brothers (trumpeter Stéphane and saxophonist Lionel), with appearances on several titles by organist Jimmy Smith and the maestro Horace Silver in person... It was a recording milestone that was celebrated night after night on stages around the world, from Carnegie Hall in New York to the Olympia Theater in Paris, concerts where Dee Dee thrilled her audience by singing exclusively the funkiest titles by the master of the genre... and the album's success was crowned by a second "Grammy" nomination, and the awarding of the "Billie Holiday" 1995 Prize by France's Académie du Jazz.

Dee Dee's third Verve CD, *Dear Ella*, is Miss Bridgewater's tribute to her illustrious elder, twelve songs with the profound imprint of the "First Lady of Jazz" and, as a conclusion, the Kenny Burrell composition that gives the album its title. This song, *Dear Ella*, features Dee Dee in duet with Kenny on guitar, a structure Ella especially enjoyed and often used, more particularly during the seventies, with guitarist Joe Pass. Incidentally, most of accompaniments Ella chose all along her career are represented here. The big band first - let us remind that Ella debuted with drummer Chick Webb's band, and later on, toured and recorded with the most famous ones, for instance Duke Ellington's and Count Basie's. Then, four songs have been recorded by Dee Dee with an orchestra of woodwinds, brass, and strings, in the same manner as the beautiful songbooks Ella offered us. And eventually, she is accompanied by her trio that Ella traveled most often around the world, for its flexibility and the freedom it gave her, as great recording testify.

On Slow Boat to China and *Mack the Knife*, Dee Dee happily evokes these moments of "grace". She does it with such ease live that she's able to capture the largest and most diverse audiences, with only the help of her French trio. And like Ella who considered herself (and was considered by others) as a musician and who seemed so at ease when conversing with some great soloists, (in particular during the jam sessions of the *Jazz at the Philharmonic*), in *How High the Moon* Dee Dee undoubtedly enjoys blending her voice with the instruments, singing or scatting with strong improvisers: Milt Jackson (vib), Slide Hampton (tb), Cecil Bridgewater (tp), Antonio Hart (as). Each song, according to its musical accompaniment, as well as its meaning and melodic riches, enables Dee Dee to show us every facet of her art: in turn playful (*A-Tisket, A-Tasket*), charming (*Midnight Sun*), lushious (*My Heart Belongs to Daddy*), vivacious (*Mr. Paganini*), tender and grave (*Dear Ella*), a "jazzwoman" and actress all at once (*Mack the Knife*)...

With her usual intelligence, Dee Dee avoided the pitfalls of imitation and servile reproduction, and gave the songs a perfectly personal interpretation. As a supplementary precaution, and showing great respect, the arrangers began afresh, using the language of their generation to write music that suited both the themes and the performer, and escape nostalgia by rejecting the temptation to exploit well-worn clichés.

Chosen by Dee Dee, the arrangers John Clayton, Slide Hampton, Cecil Bridgewater and Lou Levy were all accustomed to working with the most prestigious orchestras, and all of them are artists for whom, in this domain, the approximate is impossible. When you remember that André Ceccarelli has been accompanying Dee Dee for a decade, that Lou Levy was Ella's pianist in the great years of her career, but also accompanied Peggy Lee, Sinatra, Lena Horne, Tony Bennett and a hundred others, and that Ray Brown, unrivaled as a bassist, was also once married to Ella Fitzgerald, no doubt remains that the result is equal to the importance of both the project and its actors...