

built on personal relationships. The company founder, David Butler, is a former Vice President at AOL and a budding jazz guitarist, who decided to start a record company devoted to working with a small group of hand-picked, world class musicians who have been obscure because of factors other than their musical gifts. Butler works closely with these musicians to produce the music that they love, the way that the musicians want to and get that music straight to their audience, without having to fight their way through a corporate bureaucracy. Jimmy Bruno is the founding artist for this inspiring venture; and they could not have picked a better first effort than *Maplewood Avenue*. It is one of the best discs that I've heard this year and it is very highly recommended.



AL DI MEOLA

DIABOLIC INVENTIONS AND SEDUCTION FOR SOLO GUITAR - VOLUME 1 - MUSIC OF ASTOR PIAZZOLLA — Valiana Music and Media/Inakustik www.aldimeola.com. *Campero; Poemo Valseado; Tangata Del Alba; Adios Nonino; Tema De Maria; Milonga Del Angel; Romantico; Milonga Carrieguera.*

PERSONNEL: Al Di Meola, guitar.

By Dan Bilawsky

Al Di Meola's virtuosity, versatility and large musical vocabulary have been on display for well over two decades. Di Meola, working with Chick Corea and numerous other greats, attained his status as a fusion guitar god in the 1970's. He continued to attain critical and commercial success in the 1980's with his solo albums and collaborations, most notably his work with Paco de Lucia and John McLaughlin, and demonstrated a unique voice in a more world-music-based direction in the 1990's. All of these experiences, and many not mentioned above, continue to influence his music to this very day. Di Meola's latest album, featuring performances of Astor Piazzolla's music, arrives about a decade after *Di Meola Plays Piazzolla*. While the latter of these records featured a wide variety of musicians, this new record focuses on Di Meola as a solo acoustic guitarist. Light percussive background work is the only other presence besides Di Meola's guitar. As Di Meola mentions on his website, the friendship he developed with Piazzolla proved to be a major influence on him and he brings his own style, with "a syncopated rhythm concept," to Piazzolla's music. The repetitive percussive backing helps to provide a steady rhythmic backdrop on the opening track, "Campero," and Di Meola is free to roam around. He quickly demonstrates his ability to move between an impressive and bold performance vein and a more lyrical and reflective style of playing.

Rapid runs arrive in between some repeated melodic statements and the guitarist never seems to run short on ideas. The intensity is taken down a few notches for "Poemo Valseado." The spacious musical canvas allows Di Meola to vary his rhythmic direction on this piece. Gently strummed chords, pristine single note lines and bent notes are all part of the package on this song. The first word in the album title, "Diabolic," is a quality that comes through on "Tangata Del Alba" and many other songs on the album. The guitarist lists the official definition, "1. devilish; fiendish; outrageously wicked" on the back of the album and he injects the music with these qualities at every turn. A dark mood is set on "Tangata Del Alba" and, while the album opener succeeds on excitement, this piece succeeds because of its mysterious and menacing qualities.

While the percussion puts things into a firm rhythmic framework on "Adios Nonino," Di Meola has some room to roam, in a similar fashion to his performance on "Poemo Valseado." "Tema De Maria" features Di Meola's guitar, sans percussion sounds, and the guitarist is able to bring a greater emotional depth to the music in this sparse sonic setting. The feel of "Milonga Del Angel" is unique to the material on this album and provides a nice contrast to the rest of the songs. "Romantico" lives up to its title and it is, without a doubt, the most serene and spacious track on the album. "Milonga Carrieguera," another track that features Di Meola's guitar without any light percussive trimmings, closes out this enjoyable album of Piazzolla tunes performed by one of the true guitar giants on the planet.



CALABRIA FOTI

A LOVELY WAY TO SPEND AN EVENING — MoCo Records 23-002. Web: www.calabriefoti.com. *Love Me As Though There Were No Tomorrow; The Touch of Your Lips; Do It Again; When Lights Are Low/Linger In My Arms; All Of You; I Am Woman (You Are Man)/You Fascinate Me So; I Wanna Be Loved; Close Your Eyes; A Lovely Way to Spend an Evening; For All We Know*

PERSONNEL: Calabria Foti, vocals, violin solos; Matt Harris, piano, electric piano; Larry Koonse, guitars; Trey Henry, bass; Dick Weller, drums; Luis Conte, percussion; Bob McChesney, trombone solos; Rob Lockhart, tenor sax solo; string section

By Curtis Davenport

The concept album has long been a part of our musical landscape, in jazz as well as in other musical idioms. However, making a *great* concept record, (one that does not lapse into triteness in an attempt to make the "concept" hold together) is not an easy task. Some fine performers have tried and missed the

mark, sometimes by a mile. Having heard my share of them over the years in a number of musical idioms, I find that many of the greatest concept records have taken on one of the most universal themes, love; either lost or found. So, if you're going to put together a concept album, romance is a great place to start. This brings us to the disc that we're reviewing, *A Lovely Way to Spend an Evening*, by Calabria Foti. Ms. Foti, a multi-talented artist, has clearly set out to create a concept album about romance that combines the smoldering passion of "love" concept records such as Marvin Gaye's *Let's Get It On*, with the jazzy sophistication of Sinatra's classic Capitol concept albums, which also dealt, in various ways, with romance.

This is Ms. Foti's second disc; a follow-up to 2005's *When a Woman Loves a Man*, a disc that I have not heard, but apparently follows the same concept as *A Lovely Way...* A native of upstate New York, Foti was born into a family of musicians and exposed to classical, jazz and standards from a very early age. She has been singing professionally since the age of twelve, when she joined her parents onstage at their gigs. Moving to Los Angeles early in her career, Foti has been in great demand for years on the West Coast studio scene, as a vocalist and as a world class violinist. Notably, her violin is featured in the theme of the venerable PBS show *Great Performances*, while she beautifully sings "I'm In the Mood for Love" on the soundtrack of the recent Bernie Mac/Ashton Kutcher film, *Guess Who*.

A Lovely Way to Spend an Evening announces its intentions before you even hear a single note. From the moment that you see the cover photograph of the striking Ms. Foti, giving the camera a come-hither look, as she reclines in a strapless gown and elbow length evening gloves; you realize that the concept of this disc isn't travel, but staying put, perhaps for a long time and definitely with some company. Often, the good news will stop there, as the music inside fails to fulfill the promise of the packaging. I'm happy to report that this is not the case here, as Calabria Foti, the singer, is the real deal. She is not a burnt-out rock or soul singer overreaching her grasp, as we've heard too often in the glut of "songbook" releases that have flooded the market in the past couple of years. Nor is she the operatic diva "slumming," in order to reminisce on her pre-stardom salad days of toiling in nightclubs, who now occasionally blesses



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