

Premier Song Stylist Luciana Souza Pays Homage to Chet Baker and Brazilian Masters



Interview by Paula Edelstein

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Photo by Gabriel Rinaldini

After a three year hiatus from recording, consummate artist and jazz vocalist Lucian Souza returns to Sunnyside Records with two new album produced by GRAMMY Award winner Larry Klein. The recordings –*The Book of Chet* and *Duos III* – have been released simultaneously and will be accompanied by tour dates throughout the USA and Japan.

The Book of Chet is Luciana's inspired interpretation of the music often associated and recorded by trumpet player and singer Chet Baker. *Duos III* celebrates the 10-year anniversary of the release of Luciana's GRAMMY-nominated and much celebrated CD titled *Brazilian Duos*. Her *Duos II* record also went on to receive a GRAMMY nomination for Best Jazz Vocal Recording. As the last volume in this trilogy, *Duos III* brings back her long-time collaborators – guitar phenomenon Romero Lubambo, and master guitarist Marco Pereira. Toninho Horta rounds out the recording that includes two of his original compositions and works by Antonio Carlos Jobim, Cartola, and Gilberto Gil.

SOTJ caught up with Luciana during a brief respite from her busy schedule and here's what she told us about the making of *The Book of Chet* and *Duos III*:

SOTJ: Hi Luciana, thanks so much for the interview. You've been very busy with the release of two recordings this year – *Duos III* and *The Book of Chet*. I must say, these releases reveal your consummate professionalism as a singer and your ability to interpret many of the great Brazilian masters as well as the intricate sound of trumpeter Chet Baker. You've given these compositions your own sound, so tell me, how did the concept for *The Book of Chet* come about?

LUCIANA: Well I hadn't made a record in a few years and had been brewing several ideas in my mind and Chet was one of them. I remember even in graduate school while working on Chet Baker, i.e. transcribing solos, his scat singing, etc. was something that always fascinated me. But it was his sound that drew me to his music... both on the trumpet and also as a singer. There is a very quiet quality to his sound and is very focused. Also, his pitch was always beautiful and also the simplicity and normalcy of his singing because he sings with straight tones. It's been brewing for a long time and his name became very clear for the project.

SOTJ: These ballads pretty much altered the way Chet Baker, as an instrumentalist, thought about the harmony, melodies, phrasing and rhythmic qualities when he sang them. So, for you, as a vocalist, did you focus on Chet Baker's trumpet language or on his vocals when you first heard his renditions and when you were interpreting these songs?

LUCIANA: It was really his vocals. I love him as a trumpet player but I was really intrigued by this ability that he has – at least with me as a listener – to really take me to a place. Frank (Sinatra) does this and so does Ella (Fitzgerald), but these are different places that each one of these singers takes me to. Chet has a very specific one – almost a place of nothingness. It's very quiet, it's very still and in many ways, it's what Joao Gilberto does in bossa nova. It's a very Zen space; it's quiet, and unpretentious. So I was focused on his vocals. In terms of choosing repertoire, we tried to avoid the most immediate songs like "My Funny Valentine," "Time After Time," and "But Not For Me," and really tried to get the range of his recording career and get to the substance of each one of these eras. "The Thrill Is Gone," was one of the first songs he recorded and then all the way to the Eighties.

SOTJ: As a singer, you are the complete package, as your fluid approach to the music is complete with emotion, incredible rhythm and motive development. It seems as if these songs triggered a deep contemplation of your own inspired moments. Did you have an emotional attachment to any of these songs before hearing them performed by Chet Baker?

LUCIANA: Yes, I don't know if it was exactly before Chet, but I really... I think through Chet I made a connection to these songs. And through other people as well. "You Go To My Head" is a song I'd heard Frank Sinatra sing. But Chet's renditions of these songs always provided more information. It's something about his respect and reverent formality for the composer that I've always appreciated. So we made a point to strip everything down to the most basic things on each song. No reharmonization, let's not do anything too rhythmic, let's keep it simple, keep it less, and let the song reveal itself. If we do that then maybe we've have a new reading on the song ourselves. The metronome was at nothing, like at 52! The record is for someone who wants a quiet, contemplative companion.

SOTJ: With *Duos III*, you have proven that you have a tremendous command of the poetic language of Brazilian jazz as well as great chops and emotion in your collaborations with such great guitarists as Toninho Horta, Romero Lubambo and Marco Pereira. Do you think that these three recordings, this trilogy, have helped to define your artistic legacy at this point in your career?

LUCIANA: If anything, my contribution in terms of the Brazilian tradition is to try to bring these songs of old – just like jazz musicians do with standards – to people with a reading of now. To strip them down, simple, detached and getting to the core of each song. Toninho Horta is a master, master, musician. Romero Lubambo is a phenomenal musician and has played with the Who's Who of musicians. Marco Pereira is one of Brazil's foremost classical guitarists. So each one brought an amazing tradition to each of the recordings. I am delighted to have worked with them on the *Brazilian Duos* records.

SOTJ: As with your previously released *Brazilian Duos*, and *Duos II*, this volume brings back your long-standing collaborator Romero Lubambo as well as Marco Pereira. But this time you've invited Toninho Horta to perform with you and have also included two of his original compositions "Pedra da Lua" and "Beijo Partido." What are the stories behind these songs?

LUCIANA: "Pedra da Lua" is "Moonstone" and "Beijo Partido" is "Broken Kiss."

SOTJ: Have you made plans to appear in concert in support of these recordings? If so where?

LUCIANA: Yes, we have several dates here in the USA and some in Japan. The information is on my website www.lucianasouza.com.

SOTJ: Well Luciana, it's been a real pleasure talking with you. Thank you so much for your interview and good luck with the new releases and I'll see you at The Broad Theatre!

LUCIANA: Thanks Paula. I look forward to meeting you.

SOTJ: To learn more about Luciana Souza and her upcoming concert dates, please visit her website at www.lucianasouza.com.