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Charles Ganz - ASSOCIATED PRESS

Review: Luciana Souza explores different musical worlds on new CDs



Sunnyside/Associated Press - This CD cover image released by Sunnyside records shows "Duos III," the latest release by Luciana Souza.

Brazilian-American singer Luciana Souza has made up for a three-year maternity break from recording by simultaneously releasing two CDs that explore the different but occasionally overlapping musical worlds in which she feels right at home. “Duos III” is the finale in a series of recordings of classic Brazilian songs that pair her with guitarists from her native country, while “The Book of Chet,” inspired by trumpeter-vocalist Chet Baker, is her first release devoted exclusively to American standards.

Baker is an appropriate choice because he was among the 1950s’ West Coast cool jazz players whose introspective, detached style influenced bossa nova creator Joao Gilberto. Souza did not try to replicate Baker’s sound by adding a horn player, but instead uses spare, simple arrangements played by a trio of guitarist Larry Koonse, bassist David Piltch and drummer Jay Bellerose.

Souza does not add any explicitly bossa nova flavorings to this collection of slow-tempo love ballads from Baker’s repertoire — such as “The Thrill Is Gone” and “I Get Along Without You Very Well”— as she did to rock songs on her “The New Bossa Nova” album. She shuns the vocal pyrotechnics favored by some jazz singers — only occasionally embellishing a song like “The Very Thought of You” with some wordless vocalizing. She prefers a whispery, intimate singing style — also common to bossa nova — that captures the vulnerability and sadness in Baker’s music.

Unlike the black-and-white “The Book of Chet,” “Duos III” is a splash of bright colors full of contrasting moods and tempos — from Dorival Caymmi’s fast-paced “Doralice” to Antonio Carlos Jobim’s haunting “Chora Coracao.” She is reunited here with Romero Lubambo and Marco Pereira, who appeared on her 2002 and 2005 Grammy-nominated “Duos” albums. She also records for the first time with guitarist-composer Toninho Horta, who engages in tender vocal interplay with her on his own song “Pedra da Lua.”

There’s a common thread to both albums, produced by her Grammy-winning husband Larry Klein. Whether singing in English or Portuguese, Souza focuses intensely on the lyrics and melody to bring her listeners closer to the core story of each song.

CHECK OUT THIS TRACK: Souza offers an original take on Jobim's classic bossa nova "Dindi," turning it into a yearning love song by slowing the tempo and stretching out the lyrics before she and Lubambo pick up the intensity with some bluesy jazz licks.