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## **She's Brazilian, Tempered By a Bit of Everything Else**

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JAZZ isn't multicultural -- it's omnicultural. No other music has been so open to ethnic cross-pollination, and no other art form has successfully assimilated so wide a range of influences without compromising its own essential identity. Still, it's hard not to be startled by the exuberant polystylism of Luciana Souza, the Brazilian singer who begins a weeklong engagement on Tuesday at the Jazz Standard in Manhattan. Take a look at some of the other dates on her 2002 calendar:

In January, Ms. Souza (pronounced SOH-za) took part in a performance of Danilo Pérez's "Motherland Project," a richly elaborate suite of Pan-American jazz compositions, at Lincoln Center.

In March, she sang the flamenco-flavored mezzo-soprano part of Manuel de Falla's ballet score "El Amor Brujo" with Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony.

In April, she performed songs from her critically acclaimed new CD, "Brazilian Duos" (Sunnyside), at Joe's Pub in Manhattan, accompanied by Romero Lubambo, the virtuoso guitarist of Trio da Paz, Brazil's leading jazz group.

Later this month, she'll be singing the avant-garde Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov's "Pasión Según San Marcos," an eveninglong setting of the Passion of Jesus Christ according to St. Mark, at the Tanglewood and Ravinia Festivals. Then she'll come back to Manhattan to sing the big-band compositions of the avant-garde jazz trumpeter Kenny Wheeler at Birdland.

Even Ms. Souza's Jazz Standard gig will be out of the ordinary. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, she will be singing Brazilian songs with Mr. Lubambo. On Friday and Saturday, she'll be leading a jazz quintet, with which she will perform, among other things, selections from her second CD, "The Poems of Elizabeth Bishop and Other Songs" (Sunnyside). And yes, that's the Elizabeth Bishop, the Pulitzer Prize-winning American poet who spent much of her life in Brazil. Ms. Souza has composed a song cycle based on Bishop's poetry, and is now at work on a group of settings for voice and percussion (her own, naturally) of the poems of Pablo Neruda.

The common thread that runs through all these undertakings is Ms. Souza's voice. Smooth-surfaced, coolly sensuous and dartingly agile, it is one of the most immediately identifiable sounds in jazz -- even when she's singing some other kind of music, which is fairly often. Not that she sees any reason to distinguish between the many musics she sings and loves.

"People say, 'Oh, you're so eclectic,' and I usually say that I really don't look at styles anymore," she said in an interview last month at her Upper West Side apartment. "I

recognize, well, it's classical music or contemporary this or jazz that, or Brazilian, but I'm not worried about that. Only I don't want to be categorized as 'the Brazilian singer.' I look, I sound, I am, I wouldn't want to escape that -- Portuguese is a delicious language to sing in, but I didn't want to be just that. Let people decide for themselves what I am, and if they don't like it, they can get their refund on the way out."

What manner of human whirlwind is capable of such nonstop versatility? In person, Ms. Souza, 36, looks rather like a modern dancer who took up singing as a second career. She is slight and lithe, and her handsome face, serious in repose, is more often creased by a warm smile. Born in São Paulo, she came to the United States in 1985 to study jazz at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where she later taught for several years before settling in New York. She has the charming habit of constantly apologizing for her English, even though it is fluent, fast-moving and full of the unexpected usages common to creative people who also happen to be polyglots.

"A language is something that's alive," she said, "and even if you make what somebody would call a mistake, something new can be born out of it. Like jazz. You can improvise."

Ms. Souza connects her own stylistic openness to the fact that she comes from so diverse a country. "In Brazil," she said, "everything is so -- is permissible the correct word? Anything can happen, and it's exciting that way. I could be half-black, as I am, and go to Jewish schools for 10 years, as I did. It has to do with the nature of Brazilian colonization. You know, the Portuguese came to Brazil some 500 years ago, found the native Indians living there, and then they brought Africans from Africa for another 350 years. People really mixed -- the music, the culture, the skin color."

Even so, she now thinks of herself as a full-fledged New Yorker. "Sometimes I wish I'd come sooner, but mostly I think I came at the right time for me," she said. "It's not competitive here, not in that bad, back-stabbing way. In Brazil, I was constantly being compared to other singers, and I didn't fit in. Here, there are several little boxes that I fit in, and that's great -- the more, the merrier. It's not even that I've proven myself. It's that I've done a good amount of work, enough to know myself. I have this musical vocabulary under my arms now, and I can pull from it, I can talk within my own universe. I don't know if I'm making any sense, but I used to be very focused on, is what I do O.K. for you and for you and for you? You ask that kind of thing as a younger person. Is what I'm doing relevant, is it valid, does it have quality, is it hip? I used to ask myself all these things, and now I'm asking less, because I know my music is all these things and none of these things, all the time."