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Interview

DIONE TAYLOR

Blessed with a voice of almost unimaginable power and clarity, Dione Taylor has managed to achieve both commercial and creative success within a traditional jazz genre yearning for fresh innovation. With the release of her second, enthusiastically received album, *I Love Being Here With You*, Taylor is poised to take her place among the country's jazz-vocalist elite. But for a girl who identifies as much with Chaka Khan as Sarah Vaughan, is the stiff-necked conservatism of so much commercial jazz enough for this everywoman? Eye Weekly caught up with the Juno-nominated artist while on tour in Toronto.

How did you get your musical start?

In the church. My father is a pastor in Regina, Saskatchewan, where I was born and raised. I was always around music, always around singing, always around musicians and choirs, and it was something that I always really felt drawn to: the power of music.

What does your new album reveal about you?

First of all, the album is about love. Every song on the album has to do with a different kind of love. It's something that I made a very conscious effort to do. In my work, I am really trying to be a very positive black female voice. In jazz today, you don't see a lot of black vocalists, especially in Canada, and it bothers me. Contemporary black vocalists in the jazz scene are diminishing; we are not in the mainstream market. Don't get me wrong - I love Canada, this is a great country and I love being a Canadian - but in a sense we are very conservative and that can result in certain restrictions. In many ways, it's very difficult for me to be who I am - but I am not going to compromise.

Some fans of your jazz recordings may not know that you also perform in a funk/soul band, Soular. Why is it important for you to maintain a connection between different genres of music?

It's something that I try to relate to people on a regular basis. It is not about different genres of music. For me, it is about singing and expressing myself. Whether I'm singing a jazz ballad or "I'm Coming Out" by Diana Ross, to me it's about connecting with people. All those different voices are in me and anything that I can use to express that is amazing. I don't want to be boxed in any categories - it's all about singing.

What would you like fans to take away from your live performance?

When I'm onstage, I'm trying to give the best show ever, and I think one thing about jazz musicians in general is that sometimes we don't view our performances as a show. When you get a pop performer and they are doing a show, they come at the audience with everything they've got: makeup, high energy, wardrobe, dancers, lights, effects, everything. It's not just the songs, it's the way you present yourself, and that's what I'm trying to do. I want people to be entertained when they come to see Dione Taylor. I mean I don't have the dancers... but you never know! JON SARPONG



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