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THE JAZZ SINGERS

November 27, 2003

Spencer Michels reports on a school for aspiring jazz singers and the growing popularity of this musical form.

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SPENCER MICHEL'S: In a Los Angeles recording studio, Tierney Sutton got together recently with instrumentalists and a producer to craft a new album of songs she hoped would be a breakthrough to jazz stardom. (Singing)

In a summer jazz camp near Chicago, students who grew up immersed in rock 'n' roll worked to master a singing style more reminiscent of vocalists who were household names before most of them were born. Together, they're evidence that one of the oldest traditions in American music is showing new signs of vitality and life: Jazz singing. (Singing)

Though some observers say jazz is losing its audience, you'd never know it from the vocal section at the music store. Star jazz performers like Diana Krall, Norah Jones, and Jane Monheit are being promoted with big budgets and major marketing pizzazz. Their records are selling in numbers once associated only with major pop artists.

As the trend has grown, discs by older jazz singers have begun sharing space with up-and-coming artists who have not yet become household names. So rising professionals like Tierney Sutton have a dual mission: Enlarge their own audiences while also introducing jazz singing to those who aren't familiar with it. She believes the time is right to do both, and hopes her new album, "Dancing in the Dark," will win her a new level of popularity with the growing audience for vocal jazz. She says Diana Krall, whose albums have won four Grammys and sold in the millions, helped create that new audience.

TIERNEY SUTTON: She's a delightful singer and a very good pianist, and for people in jazz and jazz fans it's very thrilling to see more people hearing these great tunes and hearing this music. At the same time, how she was marketed, which was as a beautiful woman much in the same way that pop singing is marketed, made a shift in how, I think, the record business saw the potential of how you market jazz singers. (Borla singing "Very Early")

SPENCER MICHEL'S: The singer Janice Borla, who runs the only jazz camp devoted to solo jazz singing, also focuses on building an audience as much as on building singers. She started her camp in North Central College in the Naperville, Illinois, long before Monheit, Krall and Jones became popular. Now the camp has a waiting list. Six evening concerts by the faculty are completely sold out in advance. Borla says there is a reason jazz singers are finding an audience again.

JANICE BORLA: I think the American public is starved for singers. I think that the reason

why there seems to be a great popularity of jazz singers right now is that they're singing in a manner that's very accessible to a broad general taste, regardless of your knowledge of jazz, and I think the American audience is very grateful to have some singers back on the scene.

SPENCER MICHELSON: These students want to be part of the next generation of singers, but there's lots to learn. The teachers knew they couldn't teach everything in only five days of camp, so they encourage students to react to what others were doing at the moment they did it.

Making up nonsense syllables and keeping the rhythm and melody is called "scat singing." Even better than any explanation was the example of precise interaction between faculty members Floyd Standifer and Judy Niemack in concert. (Jazz scatting)

FLOYD STANDIFER: What I'm pointing out to you now is...

SPENCER MICHELSON: Seventy-four-year-old Standifer is also the camp's one-man history department. He began his career playing with Billie Holiday. He introduces students to new subtleties in singers they are already familiar with.

FLOYD STANDIFER: Sarah Vaughan would become a benchmark -- she would become the standard by which jazz singers between Sarah Vaughn and Ella Fitzgerald, Anita Oday maybe, these are the people who set the mark.

SPENCER MICHELSON: This is history with a beat. Standifer says it's important to for singers to learn about the rich history of jazz singing.

FLOYD STANDIFER: The people who scat sing now are doing no more nor no less than what Louis Armstrong would have been doing or what Bing Crosby would have been doing.

(Demonstrates jazz scatting)

Louis might have done something like that. Now you may get somebody standing onstage talking about (demonstrates jazz scatting) now you say, "What does that mean?" To somebody, that's the same as "Stardust."

SPENCER MICHELSON: But it sure doesn't sound like "Stardust."

FLOYD STANDIFER: No, but it gets the same job done.

SPENCER MICHELSON: These days, Tierney Sutton is trying to get the job done her way, but she recognizes the debt she owes the jazz greats of the past. Her latest album is a tribute to Frank Sinatra, who, for her, was an acquired taste. She had to do a lot of listening before she understood her legendary predecessor and was ready to pay tribute. But when she assembled with the other musicians in the studio, it was time to forget the research and react to what others were doing. Improvise. (Sutton singing "All The Way") Each tape received a lively critique during the playback

TIERNEY SUTTON: No, no, no, I think it's okay.

TIERNEY SUTTON: You take a bunch of people that have a common language and a

common set of skills and then you bounce off of each other. And a lot of the great records and great improvisations that has happened in the history of jazz is because one musician had an idea and the other musician heard that idea and reacted to it.

SPENCER MICHELS: Tierney Sutton hopes her next album, due out in February, will win more converts to vocal jazz and will break the 100,000 sales mark for her, for the first time.

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