

L.A.

JAZZ
SCENEJUNE 2004
Issue No. 202CALABRIA FOTI AT THE
CROWNE PLAZA

I suppose that this review should really be about trombonist Bob McChesney whose gig it was, but he gets press attention, as well as he should since he is without a doubt one of the best jazz trombonists on the planet. However his wife, the talented and lovely Calabria Foti, is not yet well known as a jazz vocalist. But she will be. Local singer and vocal teacher Tierney Sutton - who knows a thing or two about singing - stated that Foti's debut CD, "When a Woman Loves a Man is the best jazz vocal CD I've heard all year!" I have not yet heard that CD but I did catch Foti's recent live performance at the LAX Crowne Plaza hotel and I share Sutton's enthusiasm. I even love pronouncing her name (anyone named Calabria Foti (kah LAH bree ah, FOH tee) was obviously born to sing.)

Florida born Ms Foti is from a musical family and is a classically trained violinist who, early in her career, served as Associate Concertmaster of the Tampa Symphony in Florida. Her talents as both vocalist and violinist grace the soundtracks of many motion pictures as well as the Hollywood studios. She is also busy directing the popular Nouvelle Musique, a Los Angeles-based musical entertainment company that provides elegant ensembles for special events. But, based

on her recent gig at the Crowne Plaza, I predict that she will be equally successful in the local jazz venues.

McChesney and his group - pianist Ed Zack, bassist, Kenny Wild and drummer Dick Weller - kicked things off with a couple of jazz standards, including the well-worn Rodgers & Hart "Have You Met Miss Jones." Foti then took the stage and swung into a very hot version

of "In Love in Vain." The burning tempo had nothing to do with Leo Robin's sad tale of unrequited love but, not to worry, Foti's version worked just fine. She followed with "You've Changed" and included the verse to this beautiful ballad. Vocalists seldom sing verses. Some are abysmal, some are mediocre but many are well written. In fact, the better composers often did their best composing in the verse where they felt freer to experiment a bit. Carl Fischer's verse to "You've Changed" is definitely worth hearing. Foti followed with "The Touch of Your Lips," working the first eight bars to the Ray Noble evergreen with just Kenny Wilde's bass. She scatted the second chorus and her scating, by the way, was subtle and not simply a display of technical accomplishment. She negotiated all the changes without the slightest hint of discomfort.

She sat out the next number which was "Stella by Starlight" done in fast three-four time, during which McChesney sprinkled the Crowne Plaza music room with sixteenth notes and got patrons' heads a-bobbing. You could almost see the skid marks as the group wound down for the finish. But, although he has chops to burn, McChesney always plays music rather than technique.

Foti closed out the first set with a fine version of Brooks Bowman's classic "East of the Sun." For more information on this lovely singer with the lovely name, visit her website at www.calabriefoti.com/. Calabria Foti is a most welcome addition to the club scene. A big thank you to Merle Kreibich for continuing to present the very best jazz talent in the very best venues.

—Roger Crane