

Music



ERIK JACOBS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Terri Lyne Carrington in the recording studio at Berklee.

only male presence on the new record is through many of the songwriters.

"There's a bit of a feminist statement that these are all women gathered together to make something," Carrington says. "I did it one time and realized there were more women I wanted to work with, so that's why I decided to do part two."

"As a bandleader, Terri Lyne is the consummate musician," says Lalah Hathaway, who sang "This Too Will Pass," a Carrington original, on the new album. "As she is as a human, she's very generous. In the studio, she is a crazy person. I've worked with her enough times to know that she's about her business and she is super musical and absolutely has a vision."

Hathaway appreciated the project's overarching theme to spotlight female musicians, but she also knew it was secondary to the music at hand.

"As a woman, the energy is, 'Wow, this is a project that features all female players and writers and engineers. This is phenomenal,'" Hathaway says. "As a musician, I'm not thinking about that at all. This is not the kind of band that Terri Lyne put together for the look or theme of the project. She just got all kickass people."

Simpson, who reinterpreted "Somebody Told a Lie," which she had originally written and recorded with Ashford & Simpson, respected Carrington's new ideas for the song.

"She's somebody who intuitively knows what she wants but will allow you to take the freedom you need to express yourself," Simpson says. "It's amazing that these women were able to start at the beginning and get to the end. That's a true testament to her how she handles the erratic personalities of different artists."

The performances range from funky (check out Chaka Khan's rendition of "I'm a Fool to Want You") to sublime (the legendary Nancy Wilson, now in her late 70s, has still got the magic on "Imagine This"). Paula Cole's version of Bill Withers' "You Just Can't Smile It Away" is another revelation, a master class in smoldering. "She e-mailed me after she heard it and said, 'You bring out the soul in me,'" Carrington says with a laugh.

"There's been a fair amount of buzz and excitement around this record, and it's been interesting to see that not a lot of people are mentioning that it's all-female, which is great," Carrington says. "But I'm also proud of the fact that it is, because people still aren't used to that many women coming together and playing on that high of a level."

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Having her say

Terri Lyne Carrington releases second album featuring female stars

By James Reed
GLOBE STAFF

With all due respect for the artist's intentions, the most obvious talking point of Terri Lyne Carrington's new album might also be its most insignificant. Rather than noting that "The Mosaic Project: Love and Soul" features an exclusive cast of female singers and musicians, it's more apt to say it just happens to be an all-star affair made up of women.

The album, which will be released on Friday, is so good that the performances and the caliber of musicianship trump any distinctions based on

gender or even genre. It doesn't need to come with an ingenious backstory; it just needs to be heard.

An exploration of how jazz intersects with R&B and soul, the album is a highly personal project for Carrington, the Medford-born drummer, arranger, singer, producer, and songwriter. She produced and arranged, assembled the band and singers, and weaved it all together in her spare time away from Berklee College of Music, where she's a professor. (Or, going back, perhaps you remember Carrington from her stint as the house drummer for "The Arsenio Hall Show")

"It is a constant challenge to clever-

ly or interestingly talk about love in an inspired and imaginative way," Carrington writes in the album's liner notes. "I've explored this with an incredible gathering of many virtuosic women, making music that is not easily defined."

True enough, the credits are flush with boldface names. Chaka Khan, Natalie Cole, Valerie Simpson, Ledisi, Lalah Hathaway, Nancy Wilson, Lizz Wright, and Oleta Adams are among the vocalists. The instrumentalists are just as impressive: bassist Meshell Ndegeocello, violinist Regina Carter, pianist Geri Allen, saxophonist Tia Fuller, and so on.

"With the vocalists, I wrote the ar-

rangements, and sometimes the songs, with them in mind," Carrington says. "I sent them demos and tried to sing it in a way where they could hear themselves doing the song. As far as a mission statement, I just said, 'I'm making a record, and I'm hearing you on it.'"

"Love and Soul" is the second installment of "The Mosaic Project," the 2011 album that also showcased all-female musicians, such as Cassandra Wilson and Esperanza Spalding, and garnered Carrington her first Grammy Award for best jazz vocal album the next year. (She was first nominated in 1989.)

Beyond Billy Dee Williams's spoken-word interludes, essentially the

By Mallory Abreu
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To anyone who hears it in passing, the name Zac Brown Band might mean country music, beards, or the man himself: Zac Brown, who formed the group in 2004. But the eight-member band, whose recently released fourth album, "Jekyll + Hyde," ranges from Gaelic roots to hard-rock undertones, is quickly proving much more than just one man or genre.

The lineup — with Jimmy De Martini, John Driskell Hopkins, Coy Bowles, Chris Fryar, Clay Cook, Matt Mangano, and Daniel de los Reyes — are musicians from a wide variety of backgrounds. Reached by phone in separate interviews prior to their setting out on a tour that comes to Fenway Park on Friday, De Martini, Bowles, and Cook described how the leader's increasing openness to collaboration had provided opportunities for them all to pitch in with the songwriting.

What resulted is an album that Cook describes as "musically schizophrenic," befitting its title. "It's not necessarily country music; it's just that country radio plays us, and they've given us a home," he says. "It's always been 90 percent what we feel like the song is asking for, and the other 10 percent is our own fancy, seeing what we can come up with."

De Martini, the band's fiddler and a harmony vocalist, was the first permanent member to join the Zac Brown Band in 2004. Coming from a mixed background of classical violin and rock guitar, he merged what he describes as his "two different worlds" when he signed on.

"Zac has always collaborated," he says. "But he used to work with just one person, and now he's open to four or five people having ideas on one song."

On the first three Zac Brown Band



DANNY CLINCH

ZAC BROWN BAND

At: Fenway Park, Friday-Sunday at 6:30 p.m. (Saturday sold out)
Tickets: \$61.50-\$101.50
www.livenation.com

finishing a song — where the song just starts writing itself." A riff might unfold into a four-tiered vocal harmony, a rich blend of tenors that cascades toward Brown's voice; working spontaneously infuses the band's songs with a distinct flavor: home-grown, and occasionally chicken-fried.

Cook — a blues-steeped player who attended Berklee College, and who in 2008 became the band's self-described "in the rafters" high harmonist, steel and acoustic guitarist, mandolinist, and keyboardist, after collaborating with John Mayer as Lo-Fi Masters and performing in the Marshall Tucker Band and Y-O-U — insists that the group doesn't write primarily for recordings.

"With 'Jekyll + Hyde,' we were really starting to think of how this would play in a show," he explains. "We're not really an album band. The album is basically a business card to get people to see us play live."

And whatever the disparate parts that go into the music, De Martini says, "at the core, everything still sounds like the Zac Brown Band. It has our signature sound of harmonies, guitar and melodies. And our songwriting has the storytelling — it comes from us writing about real things that people go through in real life."

There's no master plan setting the band's agenda, he adds. "It's an organic process. It's our music, and as long as our fans seem to enjoy it, are into it, and we're having fun, then that's all we care about."

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Sounding a common chord

Working with Zac Brown, band members have their say

albums — "The Foundation" (2008), "You Get What You Give" (2010), and "Uncaged" (2012) — Brown worked closely with songwriter Wyatt Durrette to create tracks. But on "Jekyll + Hyde," he enlisted Niko Moon as a songwriter-partner — and reached out to his bandmates as well.

"It's awesome that everyone can have input," says De Martini. "It's a recent thing for me. [Zac's] encouraged me to contribute more recently, because I always have been a little timid to show people the stuff I write. He en-

courages everybody to be a part of the writing process, so it's definitely more of a team effort these days."

Bowles, enlisted in 2007 to play guitar and keyboards, has watched this open approach materialize. "It's a pretty cool democracy, in that when one person's writing, they come to the table and say, 'Look, here's this huge song, but I don't have a bridge to it,'" he explains. "Everyone's accustomed to throwing stuff out there and seeing what sticks."

And as the band has grown, so too

has Brown's eagerness to collaborate more widely. Tracks like "Mango Tree," a jazzy duet with Sara Bareilles, and "Heavy Is the Head," a rhythmic rock venture featuring Soundgarden vocalist Chris Cornell, are just a few examples on the new album.

With the studio transformed into a hive of ricocheting ideas, Bowles describes songwriting as "a really magical process. You don't realize how beautiful an idea is until you do it with other people. There's this really shimmering, awesome thing when you start