

Ida Landsberg | 2008 | Artist Interview



Ida Landsberg possesses a uniquely unforgettable voice and vocal talent. With a classical training in singing, piano, flute, music theory, Ida always seems to find her own particular way to portray the vocal element of a song. I first heard her on Beautiful love, I was struck by how light and bouncy her vocals were yet retained an intense level of expressiveness. Then I realised many of the songs consistent of just a guitar and Ida's vocals. Yet they remained harmonically rich despite the use of space between musical motifs and phrases. Ida kindly took some time to speak to us about how a vocalist would like to work in the framework of a solo guitar accompaniment.

TT -I know it's strange to interview a vocalist like yourself for a guitar blog, but I really feel that a strong vocal segment can enhance a guitar line- have you worked with any guitarists before and what was that experience like?

IL- Actually my musical activity in the last years was pretty much based on a collaboration with a guitarist, Simone Salvatore. We met 8 years ago and put together a jazz quartet, but first for budget reasons and after for free choice, we reduced the group to a trio (voice, sax, guitar) and then to a duo (voice and guitar).

Before we tried to play in duo, my guitarist always feared that something could miss in the ear of the audience, a bass, the drums or the completeness of a piano – which, I think, is the biggest enemy of any guitar player. And so our work on the songs that we were playing was mainly concentrated on compensating other instruments that could be missing in our musical ensemble.

It took several years to Simone developing the walking bass, so that nobody would tell that a bass was missing and now he is working on imitating the big band brass section and some rhythmical percussion elements.



But all these years, because of our "fear of the silence" - the fear that there couldn't be "enough sound" to satisfy an audience - we tried to imitate a big group of musicians that accompanies a singer.

In these last months, something changed in our philosophy. We didn't want to be anymore "a singer accompanied by another instrument", we wanted to become two soloists that communicate together. We finally stopped fearing the silence and even started to use that silence as a musical element, the silence that is able to enhance vocal lines or the vocal lines that underline the expression of guitar sounds.

And I must say that it is a big, but very interesting challenge that finally brings a real dialogue into our music. Because it allows us to transform the voice more into an instrument and let the guitar feel much more like vocals.

When people hear about "silence" in music they're tempted to think that the music gets simpler or easier, but I mean exactly the contrary: the silence gives us the possibility to make our music more complex. It allows us to invent rhythmical patterns, to create tensions and to express our full virtuosity because it leaves space to both instruments.

And all this is possible with a guitar because with its warm strings it mixes very well with the voice. A piano / voice duo sounds much more banal. So I can say that my experience with guitarists is very good because it stimulates a lot my musical development.

TT- Do you think the reason a piano/ vocal combination sounds flat is the lack of 'space'? I ask because that's what I love about your recordings... the lovely space in the music.

IL- Well, I think it is a combination of "lack of space" and a simple question of timbre. Piano players are used to be autonomous and this is what you hear when they're playing with other instruments.

They're even too complete in playing all together, bass, chords, melody and rhythm, so that a voice easily can become superfluous, but if you find a good piano player, he will be able to reduce and to give a chance to the vocals to express themselves.

Above all, I think it is a fact of tone colour, the voice and the guitar have a timbre that sounds very alive. I cannot say that it is because both instruments are "string" instruments but probably because both singer and guitar player have a very direct contact with the string while producing a sound, the singer uses its own body part and a guitar player can influence the sound by touching a cord in a certain way, by hitting, pinching, sliding or muting it, by changing the position of the string contact. A piano always creates the same sound, unless a piano player - like in the contemporary classical music - enters into the piano and starts hitting and scratching the chords by his own.

Simone Salvatore



Simone is an Italian guitarist currently playing in several jazz, funk and R&B bands. However, his "special project" started in 2000 with Ida Landsberg in an effort to play in smaller ensembles either with Marco Guidolotti on sax or as a vocal and guitarist. Simone also writes for AXE, a strictly guitar oriented magazine and is an IBANEZ guitars and LINE6 amp endorser.

MP3
feature: Beautiful
love With a quick, bouncy, airy, vocal delivery Ida has pushed this song into an upbeat, contemporary Jazz piece.

TT- I see, do you have advice for guitarists who accompany vocalists?

IL- Accompanying a vocalist for a guitar player is a very interesting but hard exercise too, because the guitar player should be able to play in all the tonalities that the singer chooses and the singer will always choose the most difficult ones for every instrumentalist, because he needs to find the tonality that best stresses the characteristics of a song.

An intimate song will be sung in a comfortable tone range for the vocalist, a dramatic song will be sung in a higher tone range. Vocalists need to make a precise research on the best tonality to choose and often a minor second will change the sound of voice and let it become smoother or sharper. Other instrumentalists will choose the "easiest" tonalities while they're playing, singers won't, they only choose the most beautiful ones.

When you accompany vocalists in small ensembles in a "jazzy" or acoustic non conventional way (I mean in a way that isn't the classical folk songs beach guitar accompaniment), there are several things to respect.

My experience is that songs become much more interesting when the guitar avoids playing chord voicings that repeat the vocal lines. And this isn't that easy because (jazz) singers usually use to modify the melody, so that the guitar player always needs to think "in the future" in order to avoid exactly the notes that will be sung by the vocalist.

In fact, in our album with original songs that we are recording in this moment, the guitar will play a lot of "colours" that are far away from the vocal lines. Other important things are the volume of the guitar or the choice of the guitar sound, that should be similar to the timbre of the voice.

And an advice that works for all instruments and which, at my opinion, is the most important element of all music playing: interaction. Play with your vocalist as if you were talking with him/her. The secret of any really touching music is telling a (musical) story - also if there aren't any words to say.

TT- So what have you got planned for the future?

IL- We have a very concrete plan for the future: we're just working on my first album with original songs - some say they sound like Bacharach, which for me would be an indescribable complement, where the guitar will appear, but without being the main instrument.

In this album will appear a lot of other instruments like the piano, a brass section, a sax, a trumpet, bass, drums, percussions, solo guitar with the collaboration of great musicians like Frank Gambale (guitar), Ferruccio Spinetti (db), Andy Gravish (trumpet), Marco Caudai (bass) and others.

While writing the songs I noticed that it is astonishing how much the song style is influenced by the instrument on which you compose it. My songs are pretty much piano based and use typical and comfortable piano voicings and patterns, while the songs of my guitar player use the typical guitar way of writing and accompanying.

The piano voicings I used are almost impossible to play for a guitar because of the extensions or rhythmical patterns, but we can obtain the most interesting result by trying to play my songs in the voice-guitar duo.

The guitar needs to find a way to imitate the piano voicings and will use different tone colours, clapping techniques, harmonics and unusual positions on the guitar to have the same result. I can only recommend guitar players to do the same, they will get a new musical richness.

TT- Any plans to add other instruments into the mix?

IL- Actually, while playing our standard jazz repertoire, we already play with many other instruments, it always depends on the club's or theatre's requests and (obviously) of their budget. Our most frequent ensemble is the trio. And there are different aspects to respect for the guitar while playing with different instruments.

In our Sax-Voice-Guitar trio, the guitar can play fully and use all the common accompanying styles with walking bass and full chord extensions, because it plays with two soloists. The thing changes when the "baritone sax" starts to imitate the bass lines or when we play with a double bass.

The guitar needs to reduce its own bass lines, to play chords in the medium tone range and try to create a rhythmical section together with the bass. While playing with a piano, the guitar needs to reduce to a maximum, the piano will take over the complete accompanying and the guitar will become exclusively a solo guitar.

I think the most difficult is playing with a drum without a bass. The guitar player needs to split himself and create a rhythmical section with the drums by imitating the bass - but without forgetting the chords that fill the song.



MP3
feature: **You Don't Know what Love is**
In this slower tempo, Ida has adopted a more dense vocal delivery. The interplay between her voice and the archtop is much like a swing from counterpoint to accompaniment.

Links: Ida Landsberg www.idalandsberg.net Simone Salvatore <http://www.myspace.com/simonesalvatore>

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