

Jazz Notes Intel: The Truth Chapter with Vocalist Extraordinaire Luciana Souza; Pianist Uri Caine Celebrating Pioneer Civil Rights Hero Octavius Catto; Singer Roseanna Vitro; and Clarinetist Andy Biskin
[Jazz & Cabaret News & Reviews](#)



By Dan Ouellette, Senior Editor ZEALnyc, September 4, 2018

After three years ruminating on her next project, the elegant Grammy Awards vocalist winner Luciana Souza has returned with not one, but two recordings—her beautifully reflective album of poetry that she set to music, [The Book of Longing](#) (her ninth album for Sunnyside Records), and an alchemic collaboration with the Los Angeles-based jazz collective Yellowjackets (17 Grammy nominations for its 30 albums) on [Raising Our Voice](#) (Mack Avenue Records).

At the heart of both projects, the Brazil-born, L.A. transplant Souza says, is the belief that truth as our moral barometer has been tilted in these times the wrong way. As regards her new solo work, which calls out for inner peace, she says, “It is truth because the music and lyrics are telling about life. It feels like morally we’re in a pit as all we’ve tried to build is being deconstructed right in front of us. I’m hoping the music I make will bring in some stillness in the midst, a time to be honest, to rest, to go inward.” The spare and pensive [The Book of Longing](#) is a captivating song cycle of poems Souza wrote along with four darkened gems by iconic troubadour Leonard Cohen from his 2006 poetry collection, [Book of Longing](#) (hence her paying tribute to him with her title). “Leonard’s poems are so direct,” she says. “They’re not high-brow. They’re very much in place as to what he wanted to express.”



Luciana Souza; photo: Anna Webber

Souza also delivers the winter-of-your-love mediation by Edna St. Vincent Millay “Alms”; the most hopeful tune of the pack, Emily Dickenson’s night-vision poem, “We Grow Accustomed to the Dark”; and a sober look to the future in Christina Rosetti’s “Remember.” That’s the album finale, but Souza says that it links right back to where the recording started in the same key with her original melodic beauty “These Things,” musing about “the roads that took us nowhere/or somewhere/I don’t know how to get back to you”).

The music is played by the stellar trio of guitarist Chico Pinheiro and bassist Scott Colley, both of whom deliver sumptuous support that goes beyond the basics of rhythm. Souza added in percussion in an overdub. “I’ve used fewer instruments than previously,” she says. “I love music that grooves, but I wanted to get deeper into the passionate, to unzip it. The music is comforting but also is dark. But I don’t fear it; I’m not afraid to go to that place because it can heal.” With an unpretentious sense of

vulnerability, she confronts the challenges of personal politics on her original “Tonight”:

We were not meant to last at all
You laid the blame, I took the fall
You rose so high I lost my sight
The storm will see us through tonight

“This a story of the leading to the end,” she says. “It’s a relationship of sorts, a completed cycle. Believe me, in my life I have known the turbulent times with family, friends, so I’m not hesitant to go there. There’s the sadness and reflection, but that’s where the growth comes. If you’re closed off to that, nothing can get through the brokenness.”

As for delving into poetry in the day of fast YouTube and Spotify hits, Souza says, “Poetry requires an act of concentration. Poetry opens you to other parts of your brain and can offer new revelations.” Produced by her husband Larry Klein, *The Book of Longing* is a masterwork by Souza, who has said, “The greatest truths can be expressed silently.”

While *The Book of Longing* was a project that was long in incubation, Souza’s involvement with the Yellowjackets started off as a one-shot add-on of her wonderful wordless vocals on a couple of songs that led to her collaboration with the electro-acoustic quartet on more than half the album’s tracks. Saxophonist Bob Mintzer says, “Luciana altered the equation in the band. She added the seasoning. She’s a fantastic musician. She brought a lot to the table.”



Raising Our Voice album cover.

With *Raising Our Voice*, the Jackets are making a blatant call out against the present dysfunction of the U.S. leadership. Founding member and keyboardist Russ Ferrante says, “We’re making a statement. We’re adding our voice to the resist movements. We felt it was time to bring the truth.” With support from Souza’s vocals, Ferrante contributes the moving, introspective tune “Mutuality,” based on the Martin Luther King Jr. speech, “Network of Mutuality.” The harmony goes through every key (minor and major). “This is a good example of making a statement but on a subtle side,” he says. “It really connects to the title of the album, which has a

political slant. It's about waking up to see what's going on. We take everything for granted. A lot of musicians get in their own bubbles of charts and harmony, but don't connect to the world we live in. We need to be less preoccupied and see the urgency of making music as a resistance." Souza adds, "Raising Our Voice is about artistry being an act of resistance. We didn't talk much in the studio about all that's going on now, but we were aware of being bombarded by all the violence and social media and the disrespectful, amoral times we're living in."