



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Mindi Abair *Classy and Silky Smooth*

By Glenn Swift

Four years ago, Mindi Abair decided to give jazz a try. The music world hasn't been the same since.

Abair's release of *It Just Happens That Way* in 2003 on Verve Records was highly acclaimed by jazz aficionados and featured a single, "Lucy's," which quickly climbed its way to #1 on the charts. Later that year, Abair was named Best New Artist at the National Smooth Jazz Awards. She followed up the groundbreaking work the following year with a second CD on Verve, *Come As You Are*. The album was considerably different than the previous one; once again, jazz gurus gave her high accolades.

But the best was yet to come.

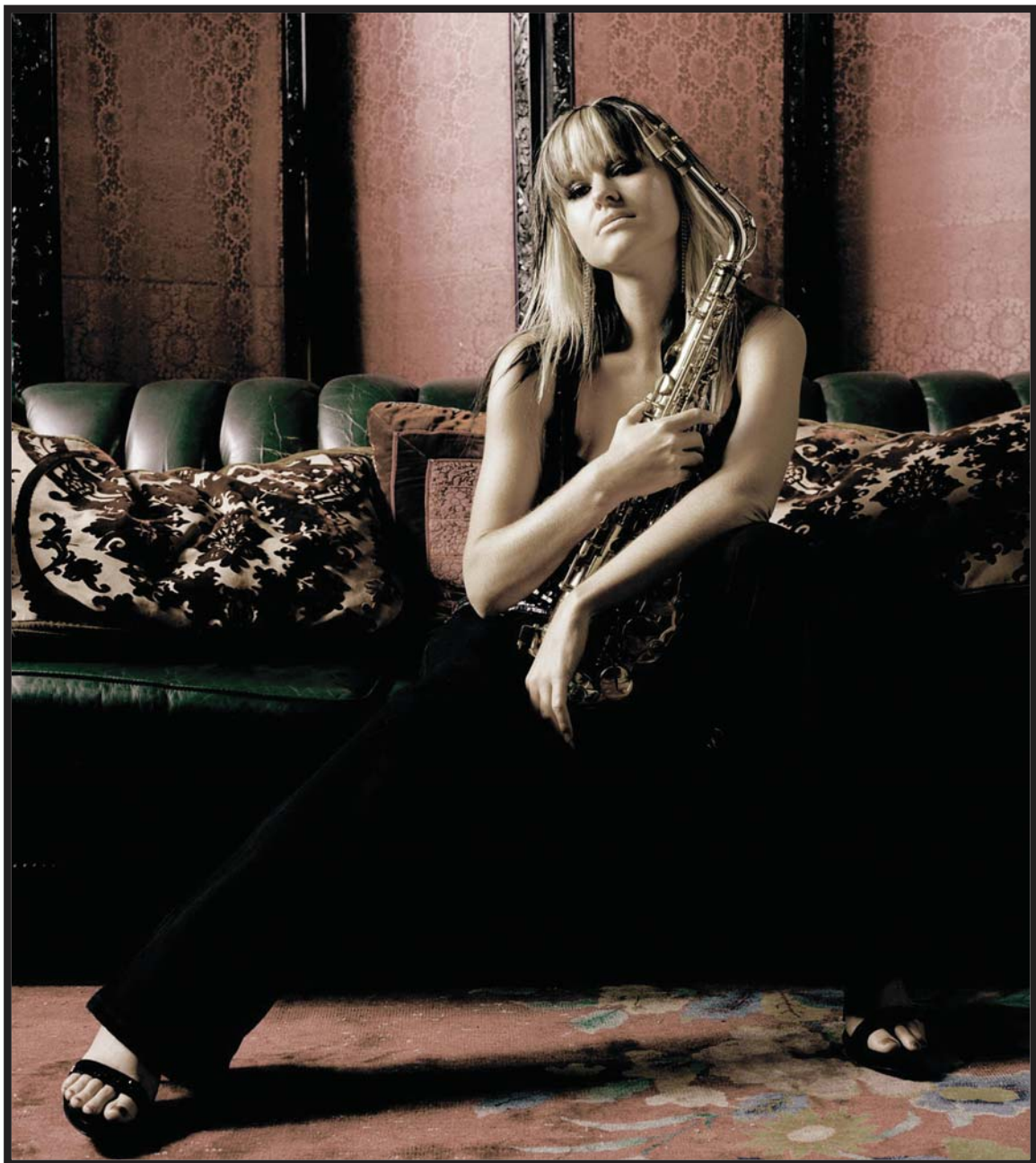
Abair's latest CD and third release with Verve, *Life Less Ordinary*, displays an even greater variety of arrangements than her first two. The album debuted at #1 on the Billboard charts and contains two #1 singles: "Bloom" and "True Blue." Both tunes have become virtual smooth jazz anthems on FM stations across the country and helped launch a whirlwind of successful engagements around the country for the brilliant musician.

"You always hope your record will do well, but to debut at #1 was really crazy. I mean all of a sudden everything broke loose. My band and I had so many bookings it was manic. For a year now, we've been on the road playing all kinds of festivals, theatres, and clubs all over the country. We've done about everything and had a blast doing it," said Abair.

This musician is no stranger to the road. Her father was a jazz saxophonist, whose band toured year round.

"Two weeks after I was born, my parents took me out on the road. We didn't even have a home until I was five," laughed Abair.

When the Abairs finally did settle down in St. Pete, Florida, the star-to-be was surrounded by a lot of music.



"Not only was I used to seeing my dad up on stage playing sax and organ, my grandmother was an opera singer and played piano. On top of that, I was always listening to music on the radio. Guess you could say that we had everything in our house from opera and classical to jazz and rock n' roll."

Despite the variety of styles in her home, Abair made it clear as to who her favorite performers were.

"As a young girl I used to sing and dance to the Go-Go's, Janet Jackson, the Police, whatever was popular." The recognizable melodies in pop music would have a lasting impact on Abair's creative energies.

Interestingly, neither Abair's father nor grandmother ever gave her music lessons.

"You know how everyone hates their

music teacher. Well, they didn't want to be that person. They wanted me to find it on my own."

Find it on her own she did. Abair began playing the piano at age 5 and the saxophone at age 8. But her decision to play the sax came about in a most unusual way.

"I was in 4th grade and the teacher set a bunch of instruments out on the first day.



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Then he told us to pick an instrument, and I picked the sax. After all, I had seen my dad up on stage playing the sax looking cool.”

Abair took to the instrument as a bee to honey. Fortunately, no one told her that the sax wasn't exactly a “lady's instrument.”

“By the time I realized that it was kind of odd, it was too late,” she laughed.

After graduating from high school, Abair attended the renowned Berklee College of Music in Boston, where she graduated Magna Cum Laude. The college is arguably the finest institution in the world for the study of contemporary music, and Abair reflected fondly upon her years there.

“Berklee was such an amazing place. It's no wonder why so many great musicians have gone there. All we did was live and breathe music, but most importantly what Berklee did for me was to encourage me to be me... to develop my own sound... not to try to imitate someone else.”

Despite her significant accomplishments at Berklee, the famed institution would not be what would give her the big break.

“After graduation, I packed up my tiny little car with everything I owned and drove to LA to pursue my career. I didn't know anyone out here and soon found myself working as a waitress to pay the bills.”

Failing to secure significant work as a musician, Abair decided to try a different route.

“No one seemed to take me seriously. They thought I was a cheerleader,” joked Abair. “So, I decided to go to the Third Street Promenade in downtown Santa Monica and perform on the streets.”

Not only did Abair get enough quarters tossed her way to pay the rent, her Third Street adventure quickly paid big dividends.

“I had been going to a lot of Bobby Lyle's concerts for quite some time. He was an incredible musician and always had the best sax players around in his

band.”

Lyle was a legend among LA's inner circle of musicians. First vaulted into the spotlight as the keyboard player for Sly and the Family Stone in the 70s, Lyle later became a jazz icon for his brilliant work with heavyweight performers like Al Jarreau and Anita King.

“He walked right up to me and told me I was really good and that he should hire me. So, I gave him my number. Of course, I never thought I'd hear back...but I did.”

Before long, Abair found herself performing as a backing musician with folks like the Backstreet Boys, Adam Sandler, and Mandy Moore. The reputation she garnered eventually led to the Verve label promoting her as a single artist.

Despite her fortune and fame, Abair feels that she her musical journey is far from complete.

“A CD is a snapshot of where you are in your life.... Hopefully, I'll be ever

changing and growing musically. I want to constantly create something different.”

Abair makes it clear as to what music means to her.

“Music can touch you in a very deep and special way. I don't care about being the fastest sax player around or the one who plays the highest note. I want my music to be able to take you to that special place.”

That special place will be the King Center on Saturday, August 18 at 8pm when Mindi Abair takes the stage along with jazz supergroup, Spiro Gyra. Get your tickets now! The King Center is located at 3865 N. Wickham Rd. in Melbourne. For tickets or more information, call (321) 242-2219 or visit www.kingcenter.com.

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