

# Jazz Journal International

## JULIA FARINO - AN INDIVIDUAL VOICE

### Talks to David Lands...

When I first heard this singer my initial impression was a slip of a girl with a tuneful voice mostly drowned out by the traditional jazz musicians present. Then one day she took the stage accompanied by just piano, bass and drums and this is when Julia came into her own. Her desire is to take these Great American Songbook classics and sing them straight down the middle letting her clear voice capture the melody. Her stylish delivery leaves the musicians to create a jazz backdrop shaping their solos around her. We have been inundated with vocalists lately who always sound like someone from the past. Julia brings an appealing freshness to the genre doing it her own way. Derek Ansell enthused about her album, *Don't Talk To Me Of Love*, in JJI August 2005 so I tracked down the lady to find out more about her.

Julia grew up in Surrey as the fourth of five sisters. 'My sisters and I grew up listening to musicals: *West Side Story*, *Half a Sixpence*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*. This was the reason I went into theatre instead of exploring the jazz world in my early years. I shared a bedroom with one of my sisters and after years of listening to her play *The Beatles* and *Abba* she discovered *Ella Fitzgerald* and we bought all the *Ella Fitzgerald American Song Book* albums – *The Cole Porter*, *Rodgers and Hart*, etc. I loved musical theatre and all these songs came from musicals so there was no real cross over.'

So I wondered how she got into jazz.

'When I was around 18 years old I started to sing with a trad jazz band called *The Beale Street Jazz Band*. I was working as a waitress at a golf club and the jazz band were playing at a function. The golf club knew I was a musical theatre student studying in London so they asked the band if I could join them for a number. They agreed and the leader of the band, *Ian Etheridge*, liked the way I sounded so I started to sing with the band on a regular basis while I finished my theatre training. At this point the gigs were only a means to get my *Equity* card as I was still much focused on theatre work. I was also listening to *Susannah McCorkle*, *June Christy* and *Anita O'Day* at this time.'

This must account for her coolness of delivery. Before she went to drama school Julia took a secretarial course because she was too young to go straight to drama.

'This was probably the smartest decision I ever took because it has kept me in temp jobs between theatre work and dry periods between gigs with my band in recent years.' Ms Farino got her 'big break' when she was offered a 6 month contract in *Les Miserables*.

'I spent the nineties performing in the West End and touring with productions all over the UK and Ireland and did some television work including *Crocodile Shoes* with *Jimmy Nail*. I loved my time in theatre but when the West End started to fill their shows with pop stars and soap stars I realised that it was time to move sideways. I concentrated on my singing and found it easy to put my drama training into performing like I was telling a story in song. It is very different performing as me as opposed to a character and it has taken me some time to adjust. I love the thrill of a live performance in a jazz setting. Improvisation is the key word and anything can happen and it usually does but I love the excitement of it all.'

When she first ventured on the jazz scene she sang with a surfeit of trad jazz bands including *Phil Mason's* and *TJ Johnson's*. She also gigged with *The Beachcombers* and the legendary *George Webb* and his *Band of Brothers*. Her inclusion of *After You've Gone* on her album is a kind of homage to those heady days.

'I decided I wanted variety on the album so we chose *After You've Gone*. There is still a bit of the showgirl in me so we had to have a big ending to the number. I thought it worked well.'

The whole album works very well indeed. I was intrigued by her choice of some of the material.

'I guess Sinatra's version of *Witchcraft* was the first I heard – and I think it's a very sexy number but I wanted to sing the song from a woman's point of view. Sarah Vaughan sings the number as if the magic is being worked on her so I thought I would be the one to carry out the witchcraft. My pianist Phil Mead introduced me to *Wild Is Love* via a Shirley Horn album called *Loads of Love*. I thought it was a great number to have on my CD. Given a choice, all the material on the album would be less well known; numbers that had been forgotten about that are every bit as good as the standards that have remained in the public arena. I had to balance my artistic desires with what would be commercially appealing songs so the album contains a nice mix.'

I noticed three very good tunes from the pen of her bass player David Moses.

'David has been composing for many years now. He approached me a couple of years ago and asked me if he could write some material for me. We had known each other for some years so he knew a lot about the sort of person I am. The songs were written to reflect how I feel being a woman in the 21st Century; trying to retain my independence alongside being a hopeless romantic. *Don't Talk To Me Of Love* may sound like the words of someone who has given up on romance but it is all about being straightforward and not playing games and asking for what you really want. *On My Own Again* reflects how I spent most of my life, you know, attempting a relationship every couple of years but finding the reality not up to much which leads nicely into *In Love With Being In Love* as I am more excited by the idea of being in love than the actuality.'

Julia has no favourite singer because she is more attracted to the songs and its sentiments than the performance but there was one record she remembers hearing when she was seven years old.

'I heard a recording of *You Made Me Love You* being played. I don't know if it was Judy Garland singing it or someone else. I recorded it on my first CD and it is still in my repertoire today. My sister Paola always requests it when she comes to hear me sing and remembers our Grandma singing this to us when we were little.'

The Julia Farino Quartet has been working together for four years. Julia met Phil Mead and David Moses at the Riverfront Jazz Festival in Greenwich, London. With John Webb on drums they became the resident band at the Dorchester Hotel for a period. Phil Mead is a classically trained pianist. His career in jazz and popular music includes encounters with Phil Collins, Diana Dors and Larry Adler. His stylistic influences are Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett. Bass player, David Moses, has played with literally hundreds of musicians in cabaret around the world including Herbie Hancock and Stephane Grappelli. David also sings and is a composer of widely published songs, instrumental and choral music. John Webb has worked with Graham Collier, Colin Bates and Blossom Dearie. Joining her swinging trio on some of the album's tracks are Alan Barnes, Ben Cummings and Campbell Burnap.

'You come across a lot of egos in the business and I am really pleased that we had no clashes of personality when putting this album together. I had some great arrangements written by David Moses and David Butterworth and all the musicians respected the material. I was extremely lucky to be able to have such established musicians on the album and although I had a reasonable amount of juggling to do to get them all in the studio on the same day it really paid off. I couldn't have wanted for a better bunch of guys.'

Try and catch Julia Farino if she gigs near you. She has a great band and knows how to put a song across in her own individual style. I hope Michael Parkinson gets to hear her and then we would hear some real class on his Radio and TV shows besides the magical Sinatra.