



Jessy J's Equipment

- Soprano - Lacquer Selmer Mark VI with a John Reilly custom mouthpiece, a Bay ligature and #3 Rico Jazz Select reeds.
- Alto - Lacquer Selmer Mark VI with a Morgan Excalibur mouthpiece modified by John Reilly, a Harrison Ligature and #3 Rico Jazz Select reeds or #2½ Rico Plasticover Reeds.
- Tenor (number 1) - Lacquer Selmer Super Action 80 Series II with an Otto Link 7* mouthpiece, a Selmer Ligature and #2 Rico Plasticover reeds
- Tenor (number 2) - Lacquer Selmer Mark VI with an Otto Link 7* mouthpiece, a Winslow Ligature and #2½/3 Rico Jazz Select reeds
- Baritone - Lacquer Selmer Super Balanced Action with an Otto Link *8 mouthpiece, an Otto Link ligature and #2½ Rico Plasticover reeds size 2.5
- Flute - handmade Haynes Sliver closed hole, C foot, with an in-line G. (This used to be Don Menza's flute).

All instruments repaired by Manny at The Horn Connection in Los Angeles.

Jessy J

Interview By Thomas Erdmann

There has never been a premium on being a new artist in the world of smooth jazz. The typical model for success in the genre has been for an artist to release a number of discs as a leader and appear as frequently as possible as a guest artist on releases by fellow smooth jazzers - then, and only then, do the fans and radio stations begin to take notice. That has not been the case with Mexican-American saxophonist, flutist, singer, dancer and actor Jessy J. Few musicians, no matter the musical genre, have made as powerful of an immediate impact as this talented multi-instrumentalist and composer.

Jessy J, who was born Jessica Arellano (not Spinella as has been erroneously reported in articles on the web and in print), was born in Portland, Oregon, though raised in Hemet, California. Her Mexican-born father and Texas-born mother held frequent parties at their home when Jessy was young. Featured at these events was live music, including the La Banda music of father's homeland. A musical prodigy, Jessy began studies on the piano at the age of four, almost immediately competing and

winning at major conferences, competitions and festivals. Perhaps her biggest achievement was, at the age of 15, winning the California state championship of the Bela Bartok Festival. Later studies on the saxophone led her to study and earn a degree in Jazz Studies at the University of Southern California. Her years of hard work paid off quickly as she found herself in recording sessions with artists like Michael Buble; later tours with The Temptations and Jessica Simpson helped to stamp the young

saxophonist as a first call musician within the highly competitive West Coast music scene. Her reputation and abilities found further admirers as calls came to work with other artists including Michael Bolton, with whom she has now toured for over two years. Time spent touring with Gloria Trevi, also known as “The Madonna Of Mexico,” and Armando Manzanero Canché, who has been called “the Mancini of Mexico,” have quickly advanced her career both here in the United States and south of the border.

Being a multi-talented theatrical artist who also has skills as an actress, singer and dancer, as well as being a great woodwind player, led her to join the cast of the off-Broadway touring company of the show Blast! When the yearlong tour throughout the United States, London and Tokyo ended, Jessy seriously began to put time into developing her own band and recording her own music. Right from the start of her work in smooth jazz she has been on the top of that world. In addition to her huge selling major label debut, Tequila Moon, in 2007 Jessy become one of the only artists to ever headline shows on all three weekends of the Catalina JazzTrax Festival.

Some of the success of her recordings has to be attributed to her work with producer Paul Brown; the guitarist and smooth jazz producing genius behind people like Euge Groove, Boney James, and Peter White. Brown thought so much of Jessy’s abilities he agreed to produce an album of hers even though she did not have a contract from a major smooth jazz label at the time; something he had never done before. Taking Jessy on the road with his own band helped Jessy to further develop her own fan base and the rest, as they say, is history.

And what do the critics think of her abilities? David Gibson, Editor of Saxophone Journal, who is notoriously stingy when it comes to certifying saxophonists as talented, recently wrote, “Jessy J is truly a gifted and talented artist. You’ll notice I didn’t say musician. Musicians are more numerous than artists... Artists are human beings who demonstrate exceptional gifts and skills at what they do... Jessy does it all.” It’s just not possible to earn any higher accolade.

How did you come up with the Jessy J moniker?

Paul Brown and I started working together in 2005. He suggested we create a new persona by having a stage name. I was really open to the idea, since he’s Paul Brown, the go to guy for making it happen. We discussed a few name titles like Hope, Jessy James, and a few others. Finally we decided on Jessy since it is my real nick name, my family calls me that, and the J just stands for Jazz. Like Jazzy Jessy, or Jessy likes Jazzy, or Jazzy J. It’s a fun name, easy to remember and easy to Google. The thing that I like about it the most is that it can be a female or male name. When my first radio single was released many of the DJ’s thought *Tequila Moon* was performed by a guy. Still to this day I have people come up to me and say, “I’ve heard that song so many times on the radio, but I always thought Jessy J was a boy.” I enjoy surprising them.

How did you end up with Don Menza’s flute?

I auditioned and was selected to play in the Mancini Institute Orchestra, alto sax in the Jazz band and auxiliary flute in the orchestra. I knew I had to play delicately. I needed a better flute, if I was going to step it up a notch. I had been playing a Gemeinhardt B-foot open-hole. I wanted a better sound and better performance. I went shopping where I always do, The Horn Connection, in Los Angeles, everyone in the business shops there, Boney James, Don Menza, and many more. I told my good friend and owner, Manny, I had this great gig and did he have any recommendations. He took out the Haynes C-foot solid silver and

asked me to try it. I put my lips to the instrument and had an immediate connection. I fell in love with the sound. He then told me it was Don Menza’s flute. Manny thought this would be the perfect instrument for me to go back and forth between jazz and classical in a seamless manner. I own it now. I use it for more casual studio jam sessions and professionally for live shows all the time.

Your flute playing is spot on with great intonation, style, articulative quality, etc. I know you started first on piano, but after you started on the sax when did you start doubling on the flute?

I never really approached the flute as a double. Essentially, I am self-taught on the flute. I learned both sax and flute together at the same time, although I played the sax as my main instrument in school band. As you know, I really wanted to play the flute when I first signed up for grade school band. But the band director told me there were too many people playing the flute and could I please play the sax. Physically, because of my size, playing the sax was a challenge but I didn’t let it set me back. My best friend played the flute. We spent a lot of time together trading off instruments going over music lessons with so much satisfaction. Looking back I’ve have to say we were nerds. Through out my musical career, I have had a lot of friends who play the flute professionally and allowed me to play duets with them. I learned fingering and phrasing on the flute the easy way listening to some incredibly beautiful arpeggio’s from some incredible musicians. For them I will always be grateful

When you were young did you take both saxophone and flute lessons, or just one or the other?

My mom got me into piano early on. My sister and I always had private tutors. I was very lucky to have as one of my first piano teachers, Mr. Elmer Littlehales, who also played the sax. He had all these great photos on the wall of him with Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr, and other great, great jazz legends. As a kid I was in awe. He taught me jazz standards like “Misty” on the sax. I had no idea when I was really young what I was learning, but I had so much heartfelt assurance from him and parents attending standing room only recitals that what they were hearing was pretty amazing. I played the music he put before me. I never really took flute lessons

Let’s back up for a second. You started piano at the age of four and were quickly winning contests, how did you decide to add the sax to your arsenal?

I love playing the piano. Playing duets after school, before dinner or after dinner was an enjoyable past time for me and my sister when we weren’t swimming in the summer. In the winter, we had more of the same except we had school during the day, homework, music and swimming lessons after school. I was already playing music three or four hours a day. I would say, I was already putting into practical application a very solid education in sight-reading, sight-singing and memorizing the fundamentals (like scales).

I had won considerable recognition playing recitals and festivals and that gave me the confidence I needed to go on to put in long hours practicing. That in itself requires a lot of self discipline and personal responsibility. At the time I didn’t realize I was developing the kind of work ethic needed to stay in the game. I grew up in Hemet, California, and they have a wonderful band and are really well known for jazz as well.

I was fortunate to grow up in a community that was all about music. Every summer I was invited to attend ISOMATA (on scholarship) which is a well known school of music and the arts

located in a little town perched on the mountainside between Hemet and Palm Springs. By the time I was in high school I was already driving myself 40 miles to take private lessons from master jazz clinicians at Riverside Community College once a week. Weekends my mom would drive me to LA if I was working on a difficult piece and needed to learn some technique from another clinician. Hemet was all about music and the piano was always the main thing in my life, until I went to college. I was mainly focusing on piano, but I had to decide which would be my major instrument in college, piano or sax, because USC didn't allow you to have two major instruments within the Bachelor's program. I asked my high school band director, Jeff Tower, what he recommended since I loved both.

Jeff told me jazz studies would open more doors for me. I could play pop, jazz, Latin, funk, or classical if I went with the sax. He knew my flute abilities would be an added plus. He was afraid I would be limited to being a keyboard accompanist or orchestral pianist, if I majored in piano. Knowing my level of commitment, he had no reservations recommending me to the sometimes grueling life of a musician.

Why did you pick USC for your collegiate experience?

I wanted to do something locally in Los Angeles. I could see myself studying hard at a really great school, doing the pop scene, making time for studio work, and still being close to my family. Hemet is not that far. Besides, I was a member of Grammy Band my senior year in high school and had plenty of time to visit USC campus where we had rehearsals. I had a chance to get to know the faculty really well. The director of jazz studies basically recruited me. He told me he would love to have me attend school and that he could offer me a scholarship. I liked that. The school of music is not a big program. Everyone knows everyone because the class sizes are small. The thought of walking around campus in the fall when the temperature drops and the wind is breezy was exhilarating to me. I applied and was accepted at other schools like UCLA and UC Berkeley, not to be mistaken with Berkeley, but decided on USC.

At USC you studied with Jeff Clayton. What did he bring to your playing?

I was very blessed. I studied with both Clayton brothers, that is, Jeff and John Clayton. They are very engaging in their approach to teaching. They are very organic when it comes to music. They're all about playing from the heart and soul, doing what you feel and being true to the music. It was hard at first. My first assignment was to transcribe a Charlie Parker solo, "Lady Be Good." I remember the solo was so fast and in G concert, which put me in E major on my alto; I hadn't really been transcribing in those keys. It was a challenge. He told me I could do it and to start by just doing two bars at a time; just do it. So I constantly listened to the piece over and over, before I went to bed, as soon as I woke up, at all times. That was when I started digging really deeply into jazz.

When I interview artists everyone tends to have their own opinion about how to use or apply transcribing solos. What is your feeling with regard to transcriptions? Do you still do them; do you think they're important?

I still do them. Right now I'm transcribing some Freddie Hubbard solos. To me they're a very important tool that has opened a lot of doors. It's important to be able to play a Kenny Garrett type solo. When I'm in the studio I'll be asked to play a solo like Phil Woods, and after that take I'll be asked to play a solo like Kenny, or I'll be asked to play two bars like John Coltrane. This happens in studio work all the time when I'm playing on someone else's project. I like having that bag of tricks. I was also inspired

by studio musicians like Dan Higgins. When I did the Disney band in Anaheim we got to go to the studios where I met Dan. He and I were talking about mouthpiece set ups and he said he plays a Meyer 5M for everything. He said that mouthpiece allowed him to do David Sanborn, Cannonball, Kenny Garrett, Charlie Parker, etc., and then he demonstrated, right there, that he could play in the style of all of those people. I was really impressed by that and I've always pushed myself to have that ability. Transcribing was important to help me gain that facility.

Now I don't try to play like anyone, but back in the day I studied Cannonball's music so much that for a whole I year I wanted to be him. I used to do a lot of transcribing by ear, listening to the solos and then playing them back immediately. I wanted to capture not just the notes, but also the spirit of the song and the inflections. Then I would be Charlie for six months, then Kenny for eight months, then Coltrane for two years. I've been selective and have my favorites from every instrument.

You played lead alto in the Disney big band. What advice do you have for students in high school and college who find themselves playing lead alto for the first time?

It is a leadership position. I found the best way to lead is by example. You need to start by having a great attitude and be supportive of your peers. Be encouraging and be early to everything; usually in the big band you have to play two or three instruments and you need get a good reed on your horns so you want to be prepared. I also played lead in my high school and USC collegiate big bands, so I had a lot of experience by the time I was holding the lead alto chair at Disney; I was prepared. My advice also includes making sure you really dig in and listen a lot to the lead trumpet with regard to articulation. Be a team player, and listen a lot to big bands like Johnny Hodges phrasing from Duke's band, Buddy Rich, etc., to hear how they inflected notes, where they scooped, how they used vibrato and did they crescendo lines. You also have to add your own style to it and not to be afraid to do what you hear.

I read where you listed Boney James and Joe Henderson as two of your biggest inspirations. What elements of each are you drawn to?

Joe Henderson is a huge saxophone legend and I love his Brazilian Double Rainbow recording. When I first heard it I just could not stop listening to it; I still have it in my iPod and I listen to it frequently. The way he fits the saxophone into the music, and the way his tone mixes with the acoustic bass and drums is superb. I love the nuances in his playing and how he relates to the other instruments; there is always a conversation going on and always room for discussion between he and the members of his band. You never get the sense that he's saying, "This is what I play and that is it;" he's always evolving during the course of his pieces. His straight-ahead music is incredible. I'm a huge Henderson fan and he is one of my biggest influences on tenor.

With Boney James, I didn't start listening to that style until later in my development. I grew up listening to straight-ahead jazz and didn't start playing pop and contemporary jazz until I moved to L.A. and was getting into the scene. When I first heard him I was drawn to his sensitivity; he really lives the music, and that's important. I love his tone and I've seen him live and he is flawless. He has top of the line instruments and really takes good care of them. I've learned a lot from him, not just listening to him, but also emailing him asking about what kind of in-ear speakers he uses on stage, what kind of mic he uses to pick up ambient sounds, things like that. I feel at times I'm his little sister because I ask him so many questions. I'm an admirer of his musicianship.

How did you come to join the touring cast of Blast!

I know a lot of musicians from my Disney days. I played two summers as a cast member of the All American College Band. We played five sets a day in the park at Orlando, Fl. We lived in student housing, our cul-de-sac was Snow White. We also had the best practice sessions with jazz clinicians who would come and play with us. We were from different states and different backgrounds, but we were serious about sight reading exciting new charts in the morning and playing the crowds in the afternoon. My roommate from that gig told me about Blast! She played trumpet for them when it was brass only. The next year they were starting a whole new show that incorporated and featured woodwinds. They were going for five saxes in the traditional big band arrangement of two altos, two tenors, and a bari. It was also going to be more jazz oriented. She put my name in the mix. She told me to audition. I went down to Anaheim and I got the gig. I did that for a couple of years

What was that experience like?

I loved it. It was my first year long tour. We lived on a bus, but it wasn't a traditional tour bus, like a coach. Everyone was young, I think I was 22. We traveled from city to city. We'd get up early, hop on the bus, get to the tour location, do a sound check, do the show, go to sleep, and do it all over again. There were no flights, all driving. The thing that I really appreciated about the show was the training they gave us. We had training in singing. That tour was my first experience with singing on a stage, up until then I had only done sight-singing and solfeggio; I was fortunate that I had had a teacher who had me sing everyday with moveable Do. When it came time to sing on stage I was really glad I had had that training.

We also had an acting coach who traveled with us and did workshops along the way. Face and body movements, even expressions were similar to Cirque Du Soleil. The dance element was huge. I grew up doing a little of that with regard to gymnastics, ballet, tap, and jazz but nothing with that much pageantry and emotion. Blast was more of a Fosse or Broadway style of dancing involving point, flex, bend, etc. I've always been a lover of any art form, architecture, landscape painting, etc., but to be able to combine it all into one made it right for me. I felt so at home, besides the show was safe and secure. All the shows were booked in advance. I made so many good friends. The show was a great way for me to combine all the tiny, little elements I had worked on separately together. The tour gave me a chance to mature and evolve to the next step in my life. It was during the run of this show, that I first started to think about making the leap to solo artist.

How did you break into studio work with artists like Michael Buble?

That was all through friends. While I was at USC I played in the big band, the Latin jazz band, the marching band, a jazz combo, the concert band, etc. I played in four or five ensembles every semester. I knew a lot of people in ensembles outside and inside of jazz. They all knew me and we had each others' phone numbers. Pretty soon I was setting up and acting as the host of jam sessions at USC that were held at a coffee house called The Cheshire Cat. I put the bands together. I would be on the phone, "Hey James, we need a drummer, can you be here in 30 minutes?" Luckily when I graduated all of that networking was laying the ground work for my own solo career. By the time I graduated I was already working at The Union with a bunch of big bands and also doing some side session work here and there.

My biggest session was some work with Michael Buble. That came from a friend, Jason Goldman, who I went to USC with. He

was in the Thelonious Monk Institute group, and then became one of Michael's contractors. I am still friends and play with that horn section to this day, but at that time Jason was putting together a band for some Christmas music Michael was demoing for David Foster. It was a big session. Brian Bromberg and David Foster were there; I've always held David as an idol of mine. That was my first studio work. Something that helps my studio work is that I've always loved sight reading, which I think comes from my classical piano background, and I've always found sight reading to be fun. From there I was called to work with Jessica Simpson that same year. People knew I could play more than one instrument, and that helps. With Jessica I played flute, tenor and bari sax. That was an easy and fun tour; I enjoyed it.

Then the drummer from that band got you into Michael Bolton's band.

Correct. He was working with Michael and their band was looking for someone who could play the tenor, sing, and do some background dancing. I had all of those skills. I started to notice that there are not that many people who have all of those skills, and I learned you have to create a niche for yourself in the business. By being prepared, being on time, playing more than one instrument and being flexible with what I do, my abilities that I had worked so hard to achieve, started to pay off.

Young musicians don't realize it, but musicians are actually auditioning for a ton of other opportunities every time they rehearse, talk on the phone with other musicians and perform, because you never know who is listening and taking notice of you and you never know how that will pan out in the future. Like you said, being positive, being on time, playing as well as you can, all comes to the fore.

I take whatever I'm doing very seriously. Even if I'm just warming up with a couple of people around me, and here I'll let you know I usually don't practice overtones in public, but in public I'll just do my regular long tone routine. But you're right, you never know who might be listening. Just as we were talking about David Foster, you never know who might be in the audience and on that session I didn't know he was going to be there. You also don't know who will be at sound checks and back stage as you're warming up. Even at the airport, I've made a lot of contacts there because I spend so much time waiting for planes. There are always a lot of musicians coming and going to gigs on the planes. The other day I ran into Paul Jackson Jr. at the airport. We were just hanging out talking about music. We talked about who we were checking out, who we were listening to, who we are playing with, what we are doing and on and on.

You can tell a lot about how serious someone is by how they talk about music. I told him I was transcribing a lot of Freddie Hubbard at the moment. Being happy and loving what you do is important. People are addicted to that because they want to be surrounded with people who love what they do and try to do it to the best of their ability. That's what I did growing up. I used to be really hard on myself; I wanted everything to be perfect every single time. As I've gotten older I've traded that for a, "You just have to do your best every single time," mentality. With that attitude you can't go wrong.

You're very connected with music programs involving the Hispanic community. One element of this is your work with the Hispanic Musician Association Orchestra. Can you describe this for the readers?

Basically it's a big band in Los Angeles that does shows to promote Latin music awareness. I used to play with them a lot when I was in college. Bobby Rodriguez, who is also a professor at Cal State Los Angeles, is the leader of the program. It was a lot of fun and that was where I met Richie Garcia, Phil Collins'

percussionist. Now Richie is my percussionist. We had such a blast working with that band that I asked him to play on my Tequila Moon and True Love CDs. He also did a show with my band this past weekend.

The Hispanic Musician Association big band was my introduction into traditional Afro-Cuban music; sambas, merengues, all of those wonderful styles. It's so important to know the difference in the styles. That band helped open my eyes to the difference between pop and Latin pop. It's also an organization that entertains; they have dancers that come out and do work during the shows. I got to see the behind-the-scenes action with regard to what makes a performance successful.

You also had the opportunity to perform at Carnegie Hall as part of the Latin Jazz Project that Paquito D'Rivera put together to help mentor young professional musicians in a workshop setting. Is there a main concept you were able to take from that experience you still draw upon today?

A huge inspiration from that moment in my life was realized in my True Love CD. I was actually writing the title track, True Love, during my time at Carnegie Hall. My favorite thing to do is jam with musicians. I developed a great connection with a guitarist who was also there at the event, and we played through my song a couple of times; I was still at the stage where I didn't even have a title for the song yet. All of a sudden the song came to life when we would play it together. He's from Curacao, which is an island off of the coast of Venezuela that is shaped like a heart, hence the name Curacao and the title of my CD True Love. Playing with Paquito was amazing, he blows me away.

When we work in professional situations as a sidemusician there are many things we come to learn, both good and bad. I wanted to cover a few of the artists who have bands you've played in and ask what was the number one thing you learned in working with them. The first is Jessica Simpson.

I really loved working with her. She's young and we're about the same age. I could see how hard she was working because at that time she was also filming The Dukes Of Hazzard, starting her own clothing line, and she was a newlywed and going through the cycle. I could see the great support she was getting from her family; her mom and dad were right next to her the entire time.

We used to do a lot of early morning dates. For example, we did Good Morning America, where the gig was to start at 5 a.m. and the soundcheck was 4 AM. I could imagine her not having the chance to sleep after our show the night before because she had to do big hair and makeup, and then having to do a lot of different costume changes to fit each song. I really admire her for doing that because I knew she was working as hard as she could to make the most of what she had. I got a chance to talk to her about it, and she was really personable about it all. She knew everybody's name in the band, she asked about my saxophones, she was sweet. From her I learned you have to diversify your talents. She is an actress, singer, clothing line entrepreneur, I like all of

Jessy J's Selected Discography

As A Leader

True Love (Concord, 2009)

Tequila Moon (Peak, 2008)

Jessy J (Self-Released, 2007)

With Others

- With Marc Antoine & Paul Brown

Foreign Exchange (Peak/Concord, 2009)

- With Blake Aaron

Desire (Innervision, 2007)

- With Norman Brown

Stay With Me (Peak/Concord, 2007)

- With Paul Brown

White Sand (Peak/Concord, 2007)

- With Gregg Karukas

GK (Trippin N Rhythm, 2009)

- With Various

Smooth Jazz #1's (Concord, 2008)

- With The Henry Mancini Institute Orchestra and Big Band

Elevation (Concord, 2006)

- With Tommy Walker

This Is What Christmas Means To Me (WeMobile Music, 2007)

that about her.

The Temptations.

I loved their showmanship. I'm guilty of watching them too much when I was playing the show. They are fun guys to work with and they were always joking at rehearsals. They're very lighthearted, and to them music is just fun. Sometimes I take music too seriously. When I started working with them I learned how music can be fun.

The next is Gloria Trevi, who is not only a very popular singer south of the U.S. border, but is also a strong feminist in tackling issues like hunger, prostitution and religion.

It worked out perfectly, because when I worked with her I was also having a similar view

of life. She is a great performer and her songs are all originals; she writes them all from her heart. She writes about what she's going through in life. For example, she'll write, "Kiss me, hug me, I'm sad right now," or "I don't like you, I want to step on you." She goes from one extreme to the other. When I was performing with her I was also able to get a lot of my own aggression out. I think it's great to step into it a mindset like that, but it's also great to step away and not have it be the center of your life. She's also a wonderful performer who gives her all 100 percent of the time. She dances, throws things off the stage, she's a blast.

The last is the man who is sometimes called Mexico's leading romantic composer of the post-war era, Armando Manzanero.

My parents were so excited when I told them I was playing with him. My dad has records of Armando's dating back to when he was 19. Armando is a huge legend in Mexico. He's written a lot of songs that have been covered by a lot of people. He was so sweet. At sound check I was putting my horn together and going over the music with the horn section, and he came over and introduced himself to us. I knew right away he was both humble and very loving and open. Sometimes the artists like to be separated from the band, or they want to wait to be introduced. The way he came up and said, "Hi, I'm Armando. Thank you for coming. I'm looking forward to hearing you." He was really nice. He's a beautiful person both inside and out. I could tell his music comes from his heart. The way he is, that's the way his music is; he's real.

I've always equated producer-guitarist Paul Brown as being the Clive Davis of smooth jazz; and Clive may very well be one of the greatest musical minds of the 20th century. Paul has something he brings to recordings that is more than just his layering and what he calls the big bottom. You've worked with Paul a lot. Can you describe what it's like to work with him in the studio?

I love working with Paul, and if I had to pick one word to describe his persona in the studio it would be cool. He never gets hot tempered, he never raises his voice, it's like he's on cruise control the entire time. He'll say, "Yeah, that was a cool take, let's do it again." I will be freaking out saying, "Oh my gosh, my reed doesn't sound good in this room, I should have brought my other soprano mouthpiece." You know how people have that moment

when they're stressing, he never has that moment. He'll just say, "Let's just stay until we get it right." He makes you feel very assured to know that it will be the best it could ever be.

When you write songs together with him, what does he bring to the collaboration?

It's fun writing songs with him. For example, we'll have a very low keyed session working in his house, and this is not in his recording studio, we'll do it in his house. For example, I'll bring out one of the songs from my CD, "Baila!," I brought it to him and asked what he thought of it. I played it on the baby grand piano in his den for him. He said, "I like it, but we need to add a section." Sometimes we start a song together from scratch, like PB 'N' J which we started together from scratch, but when I bring him a song I've already started he'll help me modify the chords or change a section or add a section. It's cool getting that Midas touch from him because he has great ears.

We all know how great Paul is in the studio, but he stayed behind the board for a long time before he came forward with his own playing. You're a member of his live band. What's he like to work with in his live band?

He's a funny guy. We have a blast. Last year we did a Christmas tour together where I gave him a little sombrero with a Santa hat for our performance of Feliz Navidad and he wore it on stage. We have a great musical chemistry and we understand each other. He knows a lot about me personally, and I know a lot about him. We've been through a lot in the last four or five years. It's nice to be able to perform with someone you're close to.

I saw an interview with you where you talked about always carrying a small recording device around you can use to sing or play little compositional snippets into for use later in your compositions. For you as a composer, how does the composition process unfold?

I'm always constantly listening. It's funny, because songs are always around us and you have to decide if you want to grab them or not. I'm inspired by events that happen. The last little song I wrote was based on Harry Potter. I was flipping through the TV and saw a little of one of the movies. Then I went to practice and was working on a scale from Slominsky's Thesaurus of Scales; working on a really exotic scale. I was imagining Harry Potter and some of the adventures he's been on and all of a sudden a song came out, so I started recording it on my sax. Then I went to the piano, recording that as well. Later I'll edit it if there is a melody or some chords I really liked. What I'll do is go back and try to find a beginning, a middle and an end. I try to be diligent. If I hear something I have to record it, because if I don't I'm not being fair to the music. I think you know that as a musician our jobs are to be faithful to what we do as artists. Whenever there is a little thing I hear I'll record it and then go back to it later.

As a woman in a male dominated field, saxophonist Sonya Jason told me she knew she had to leave the Los Angeles environment when her record company started to market her as 28 years-old even though they knew she had just turned 30. I teach a Women In Music class and always share the interviews I do with my students in that class. Have you ever felt any discrimination being female, and how do you handle it?

That's a great question. I used to feel very discriminated against, especially growing up in college. I would be the only girl in a big band of 18 to 20 people. The musicians were always cool to me, very cool to me. However, it would be uncomfortable

when older men in the audience would make advances. I was only 18 and didn't know how to handle it, so I started wearing a fake wedding ring. It was a huge rock, and sometimes I still wear one on stage. Where I grew up, in Hemet, I was very protected. Everyone knew everyone else and there was none of that. When I started playing club dates in Los Angeles, I realized I had to learn how to deal with it, so I did.

Then you have to realize I also work in the pop world and am meeting agents and managers and actors, and everyone is in the business somehow and they're just going to ask you out. It's a very fine line to tread on, but I think most people can figure it out. I'm just very open about who I am and what I do. For a long time I tried to not let it affect me. I think the record company has been very supportive of me from day one. To them, a big selling point is that I'm different, being a young female Latina saxophonist-vocalist; I have something different to offer. They do take advantage of it. They market it from a specific angle, which I think is smart.

It is a business.

Yes. It's not like they're faking it by photoshopping my pictures. That is how I look. I love fashion. I am a total girly-girl. I grew up with a sister and we played Barbie a lot. I've always been into those kinds of things.

What advice do you have for young girls who want to make music their career?

It's important to have high self-esteem because people will treat you in the same manner as you treat yourself. I always walk around knowing I'm loved. It is easy to fall into the Hollywood trap of young-girl-meets-someone-who-will-help-her-in-her-career. It happens to a lot of people. I have a great father who really loves me, and my parents are very supportive, so I knew I would never have to do anything to prove that I was artistic in any other way than how I play my instrument. Believe in yourself. You don't have to tell others you're good on your horn, just show them.

You've joined the smooth jazz movement at a difficult time in the genre's history, what with the declining number of smooth jazz radio stations nationwide. With your strong straight-ahead jazz abilities, have you thought about one day moving in that direction in your recordings?

The thought has crossed my mind. I really respect Chris Botti and his work. I've seen how he has crossed over into both genres. Diana Krall is also one of my favorite jazz performers and I love her straight-ahead jazz abilities. Straight-ahead is my first love, but I try not to put a cap on anything in the sense of, "This is going to be this, or that is going to be that." My most recent CD, True Love, did have a true goal, and that was to make a Latin pop instrumental album with a couple of vocals. That has been my dream since 2000, to create a completely Latin pop instrumental album. Now that I've completed that goal I can move on to the next thing, but I'm not sure exactly what that thing is yet. I don't want to force it; I'm just waiting for it to come.

You've toured with the Guitars and Saxes tour. A recent tour included saxophonist Gerald Albright, guitarists Jeff Golub and Peter White, and keyboardist Jeff Lorber. What's it like to go on the road and share the stage with so many heavy hitters?

I'll be honest and say it was a little intimidating at first. It was before my first CD was out and not too many people knew who I was. My first single was just coming on the radio, and I knew at that point it was sink or swim, and that's always how it's been for me; it's always all or nothing. I went in really prepared

and memorized everyone's music, which I usually do so that I'm creating a performance and not a rehearsal, and they respected me in turn. If you respect the music then in turn you will be respected. Then they ended up saying, "Hey, you have a new single out, 'Tequila Moon,' why don't we feature you on that song." They didn't have to do that because I was just a member of the backing band, but they brought me to the front, even at Playboy Jazz Festival at The Hollywood Bowl. I've learned a lot from them. Music is not supposed to be a selfish thing, it's something you share with others. I'll never forget that.

Now that you're leading your own band, is there something that surprised you about being a leader that you weren't expecting?

The hardest thing for me is replacing people. I've never enjoyed that process. As a bandleader it's important to me to have people on stage who respect the music. I've had to replace a couple of people, and it's not really a big deal, but it is something that I had not thought about having to do as a musician. On the positive note there were also a number of great things I wasn't expecting as well. The amount of response I get from the fans who watch the shows and come and buy the CDs, and how the music touches and affects them, I'm really touched by that. I feel really blessed to be able to share myself with them in that way.

What advice do you have for young saxophonists?

Practice, practice, practice. That's number one because you have to be able to speak the language in order to talk to people. Being proficient on your horn is number one. Then, dream big. Don't be scared about what people tell you, because a lot of people will tell you that the music business is this or that, and that it's really hard to make it. You don't know how many times I heard that, even when I was already established. People told me that to want a record deal as a saxophone player was insane because there were already so many sax players out there. I just let it go in one ear and out the other. Dreams can come true if you believe in them. §