

NATALIE CRESSMAN

SINGER – SONGWRITER – TROMBONIST

Possessing a voice as cool and crystalline as an Alpine stream, **Natalie Cressman** is a rising singer/songwriter and trombonist who draws inspiration from a vast array of deep and powerful musical currents. **Auburn Whisper**—her latest album with guitarist, composer, and vocalist Ian Faquini—not only serves as a testament to the couple’s symbiotic musical partnership but also to their resilience during unprecedented times. Written and recorded in 2020, Auburn Whisper finds the two artists blending traditional Brazilian rhythms with modern, expansive arrangements—reflecting on people and places they miss while discovering joy within the present moment.

Steadily evolving in many directions, Cressman has already put down deep roots in several overlapping scenes. Currently splitting her time between New York City and the Bay Area, Cressman has become an accomplished trombonist and vocalist, performing in Broadway pit orchestras, recording a variety of solo projects, and building a following in the diverse realms of jazz, funk, and jam, including 12 years touring the jam band circuit as a horn player and vocalist with **Phish's Trey Anastasio**. Deeply versed in Latin jazz, post-bop, pop, and Brazilian music, she tapped the interlaced traditions on her first two solo albums, 2012’s **Unfolding** and 2014’s **Turn the Sea**.

She released **The Traces EP** in 2017, revealing her latest evolution, as she expanded her creative reach into post-production with meticulously crafted soundscaped tracks inspired by R&B and Indie Pop. **The Traces EP** follows on the heels of 2016’s **Etchings in Amber**, a gorgeous duo album with guitarist **Mike Bono** that introduced Cressman as a formidable musical force without her horn. Drawing from impressionism, jazz, and the great Brazilian songwriting tradition, 2019’s **Setting Rays of Summer** (her first release with Faquini) is a ten-track collection of original material featuring compositions in three different languages: Portuguese, English and French. With the warm instrumentation of acoustic guitar and trombone alongside two-part vocal harmonies hugging the Brazilian-accented Portuguese, Cressman & Faquini weave their musical voices together to create a fully orchestrated sound befitting a much larger ensemble.

When she’s not performing her own music, Cressman can be found collaborating with some of the most illustrious figures in rock, funk, jazz and beyond, which have included **Carlos Santana, Phil Lesh, Dave Matthews, Phish, Big Gigantic, Greensky Bluegrass, Escort, Wycliffe Gordon, Nicholas Payton, Anat Cohen, The Motet,** and **Umphrey's McGee**. Her passion for groove music hasn’t diluted her love of jazz. In 2016 SFJAZZ commissioned her to develop music for a concert celebrating the legacy of jazz trombonist/arranger **Melba Liston**.

Her mother, **Sandy Cressman**, is a jazz vocalist who immersed herself deeply into the traditions of Brazilian music, collaborating with many of Brazil's most respected musicians. Her father, **Jeff Cressman**, is a recording engineer and trombonist who recently concluded a two-decade run with **Santana**. Natalie quite naturally began studying trombone with her father, but set out to be a dancer rather than a musician. An aspiring ballet dancer until her junior year of high school, she changed courses when an injury sidelined her dance aspirations.

Her parents provided entrée to a number of enviable opportunities, but Cressman's own prodigious gifts continued to merit her presence in any number of high-profile settings. She soon found herself playing salsa with Uruguayan percussionist **Edgardo Cambon e Orquesta Candela**, Latin jazz with **Pete Escovedo's Latin Jazz Orchestra**, world music with **Jai Uttal and the Pagan Love Orchestra**, and globally-inspired avant-garde jazz with multi-instrumentalist **Peter Apfelbaum**, a close family friend.

Cressman traveled east in 2009 to study at the **Manhattan School of Music**, and the following year jam band pioneer **Trey Anastasio** recruited her for his touring band. He met Cressman at 18, and "was instantly floored by how melodically and naturally she played and sang," Anastasio says. "Natalie is the rarest of musicians. Born into a musical family and raised in a home filled with the sounds of Brazilian music, jazz and Afro-Cuban rhythms, musicality is in her DNA."

Her far flung musical passions continue to bear new fruit, as her identity as a horn player and a singer/songwriter evolve in different directions. Playing funk trombone in arenas and cavernous theaters has required developing an aggressive new vocabulary of shouts, growls, smears and yelps, a la the JB Horns' Fred Wesley. Her vocal work in increasingly intimate and rhythmically insinuating settings has revealed an artist who can thrive in any setting, from raucous, reverberant halls to packed and pulsing lofts and nightclubs. In an epoch marked by infinite musical possibilities, Natalie Cressman is a singular force who draws from an improbable breadth of sonic realms. Cressman is an artist endorser for **King Trombones**.

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Photo: Lauren Desberg

NATALIE CRESSMAN

WORDS FROM THE PRESS

“Her veteran skills as a trombonist are clear, but what's even more impressive is her vocal performance and talents as a lyricist...If you haven't heard of Natalie Cressman, you definitely will soon.”

— *Molly Fosco, Huffington Post*

"This is a collection of angular compositions that are as intricate as they are accessible...The mix of Cressman's confident voice, tart trombone and crack songwriting establishes the artist well down the road from an already fully-established sound on *Unfolding*...Natalie Cressman continues to arrive and is sure to continue her brilliant evolution as a musician.”

— *C. Michael Bailey, All about Jazz*

“Cressman’s second release presents yet another pop sensibility infused with jazz, this time with loads of instrumentation, all of it clearly interwoven into the singer’s girl-next-door charm. The arrangements flavor everything, with subtle surprises, fresh writing and tuneful material (mostly hers). The San Francisco native’s easy, listenable lyrics are the connective tissue. Cressman also plays some serious trombone, and she has an affinity for involving others in this septet of horns, guitar and acoustic and electric keys.”

★★★★ — *Downbeat Magazine*

“A voice that can conquer pop, jazz, the jam world or whatever she decides to pursue next.” — *Shawn Donohue, Glide Magazine*

"Her trombone is world-class, but her singing voice is another thing entirely, an empathic entity that channels the ages. Cressman’s is a flawless act that can only get better with time and age. Yep, I smell a Grammy — someday.” — *Dave Good, San Diego Reader*

“A gorgeous and sensuous album...Casual, unpretentious and as delicious as dipping your bread into a plate of fresh olive oil.”

— *George W. Harris, Jazz Weekly*

“Cressman’s sylphic, clear soprano sings in harmony or solo, and she switches effortlessly to slide trombone...It may also be the first time, in a long time, that record-buyers and live audiences have heard something Brazilian or otherwise that’s so unaffected and accessible to the heart.”

— *Jeff Kaliss, SF Classical Voice*

“Musical barriers are deftly shattered as a more organic indie rock sound is somehow merged with a deceptively subtle modern jazz interpretation...The band is first rate. The tunes are wildly inventive with perhaps another talent creeping into Cressman's arsenal as her production skills seem to capture the genre bending sound that permeates *Turn The Sea*. *Unfolding* was incredibly good. *Turn The Sea* is better!”

— *Brent Black, Critical Jazz*

“Setting Rays of Summer sounds as fresh and revivifying as a clear mountain stream... Faquini is responsible for the voluptuously shaped compositions and lithe but orchestral guitar work. He also possesses a pleasingly reedy voice that blends artfully with Cressman’s bright, translucent singing...The expert songcraft on display throughout *Setting Rays* is more than impressive, but what stands out most is the way that trombone, guitar, and two voices conjure a fully realized realm.”

— *Andrew Gilbert, JazzTimes*

Ian Faquini and Natalie Cressman each have lovely voices that sound delightful in solo settings and mesh warmly, like sunshine sparkling on calm seas, when they harmonize... Perhaps it is the simplicity of this production that beckons the listener to come closer, with open hearts, and to soak up the purity of their musical message...It’s a sweet listen.”

— *Dee Dee McNeil, Musical Memoirs*

67TH ANNUAL CRITICS POLL
RISING STAR
TROMBONE



Trombonist and singer Natalie Cressman, a San Francisco native, currently is based in New York.

LAUREN DESBERG

Natalie Cressman THRIVING IN ENDLESS & UNIQUE SETTINGS

NATALIE CRESSMAN'S CAREER IS SOARING DUE TO HER ARTISTIC FLEXIBILITY. AT 28, THE VOCALIST AND WINNER OF THE CATEGORY RISING STAR-TROMBONE HAS COLLABORATED WITH NUMEROUS INDIVIDUALISTS, INCLUDING JAZZ TRUMPETER NICHOLAS PAYTON AND PHISH GUITARIST/VOCALIST TREY ANASTASIO.

Playing in a range of contexts has influenced her views on musical inclusion and expansion. "By being myself in every genre—trying to play the style but also following the aesthetic that I enjoy and the tone that I like on the trombone—I've found my niche," she said.

Her 2019 duo release with guitarist/composer Ian Faquini, *Setting Rays Of Summer* (Cressman Music), explores a Brazilian aesthetic. "I've always loved that marriage between groove music and harmonic depth," she explained.

As a singer, Cressman has developed a unique relationship with her horn. "So much of

what I love is the great storytelling and expression that comes with the human voice," she said. "So, when I play trombone, I try to stay in that mode and not get too caught up in filling the space with too many notes—really trying to be lyrical and melodic."

Faquini is drawn to Cressman's sound, intention and collaborative attitude.

"She has the most beautiful trombone sound," said Faquini, who composed the music for *Setting Rays*. "It doesn't sound like that stereotypical, super-loud brass section trombone sound. It's more like a beautiful voice—a very clean, clear tone. But that's just the technique.

[She also has] amazing note selection and ideas. She really sings with it, more than [playing] horn riffs."

As an improviser, Cressman found herself digging deep to get inside Faquini's harmony. "Generally, the functionality of the harmony is similar to jazz, but his harmonic sense draws from a lot of classical impressionist composers," she said. "He's a protégé of Guinga, who has a very rich sense of harmony—a lot of different extensions and unexpected roots. There's so much to grab on to as an improviser."

Compelled to create, stretch and push, Cressman admitted that it took some time to figure out where her sound truly resonates. "I've never really found my home in just straight-ahead music, because I don't feel like there's room for me to innovate that," she said. "I love playing that kind of music, but for me, original music that takes pieces from many different sources is way more inspiring."

Her parents—vocalist Sandy Cressman and trombonist Jeff Cressman—undoubtedly shaped Cressman's interest in a wide variety of music. And with that legacy comes critical awareness; Cressman moved to New York as a way of mapping her own route through the music.

"I wanted to be judged on my own merits," said Cressman, a native of San Francisco. "I didn't want to just get a leg up by being Sandy and Jeff's daughter in the Bay Area. They provided me many great opportunities, but I really wanted the chance to develop into my own person as a musician."

Despite their apparent differences, Cressman views each new project she engages as similar. "Musicians I've played with, even in a more 'commercial setting,' they're [artists] who have found their own way and become massively successful in providing the unexpected," she said. Anastasio saw a spark of innovation in Cressman the moment he heard her play as a first-year student at Manhattan School of Music.

"Even at that young age, she already had so many crucial elements of her musicianship fully in place—a warm and musical tone, enormous confidence and a huge range," said Anastasio, who, in addition to performing with Phish also leads the Trey Anastasio Band.

"She could play fast, clean runs in the low range without blinking an eye, and sight-read literally any chart that I put in front of her." Regarding the TAB's complex charts, Anastasio quipped, "Natalie eats them for breakfast."

During a recent concert in New Orleans, Cressman unleashed certain ideas she'd been exploring for the past few years, and left the bandstand feeling a sense of power.

"I felt like I had new options," she said. "I felt this confidence to shape it and break it open and make it something different."

—Stephanie Jones

Natalie's

Text

World

by Kirsten Lies-Warfield

“In an epoch marked by infinite musical possibilities, Natalie Cressman is a singular force who draws from an improbable breadth of sonic realms.” So reads the last sentence of her web biography, beautifully encapsulating her vision and her heart.

There is much to envy in Natalie Cressman. She grew up in a garden of music, rich in biodiversity, lovingly nurtured by her parents (both professional musicians) and by an extended cadre of their musician friends in the San Francisco Bay Area. Mom sings, and dad plays the trombone: Natalie does both—really well. Childhood vacations were often trips to see Dad (Jeff Cressman) on tour with Santana. Mom (Sandy Cressman) is a jazz singer who specializes in Brazilian music; so Natalie was immersed in the culture of Brazil from an early age and, while never studying Portuguese formally, has become “almost fluent” in the language.

Just into her thirties, Natalie’s experience is beyond what most professional trombonists will ever achieve in a lifetime: gigs in such diverse genres as indie-pop, musical theater, commercial music, Latin jazz, salsa, jam band—and if Hall Goff (San Francisco Ballet Orchestra) asks her to sit in on a regular trombone-quartet reading session, she’s up for that, too. She’s a teacher and a composer, has recorded five albums, and has performed on numerous tours (primarily with the Trey Anastasio Band as trombonist/vocalist). Natalie’s dad had recommended her to Anastasio, who after hearing her “was instantly floored by how melodically and naturally she played and sang.”

Our conversation had originally been planned around a performance of hers near where I live in Washington, DC. When COVID-19 canceled that date, we still spoke at length; and then I followed up with her in summer 2021 as hope returned for live engagements.

Origins

KLW: You attended Manhattan School of Music (MSM), and your dad was one of your first teachers; but who have been your most influential teachers, for trombone or otherwise?

NC: My dad was definitely my first trombone teacher. We didn't have regular private lessons: we'd just get together and play at the house. He taught me most of what I know and set me up with many essential concepts still very relevant to me today. I also studied with the great trombonist and educator Wayne Wallace.

Peter Apfelbaum was a great help to me in improvising and just broadening my knowledge of different kinds of music—he plays almost everything *except* the trombone! He was a really key person in my life, especially in my teens, giving me one of my first professional gigs, which was subbing for my dad at the Monterey Jazz Festival. Peter would assign me tunes and solos to transcribe on a weekly basis, and I would play them for him over the phone. Even though he was living in New York and I was in the Bay Area, he really took an interest in helping me develop musically. When I moved to New York, some of my first gigs were with him.

Then of course I loved all of my private teachers at Manhattan School of Music: Luis Bonilla, Wycliffe Gordon, and also Laurie Frink. She was such a big help for me in just learning to play my horn better and practicing technique in a way to be able to be in the music when I'm creating and improvising.

KLW: Have you had influential voice teachers? Did your mom teach you?

NC: My mom definitely taught me as a kid, and she's still my go-to when I have questions about my voice. I do think that she helped me a lot with the basic concepts. And a lot of what we learn on the trombone about breath support and phrasing really does translate to singing. Compared to a singer-singer, I don't think I dwell as much on the mechanics of singing because of that: I feel that I'm doing the same thing singing as I do on the trombone, minus moving my arm around and navigating the partials. So I guess I feel less trained as a singer because for me it comes more intuitively.

KLW: I try to sing sometimes; and I understand that the mechanics are just like playing the trombone, but my voice just doesn't go there. You've got such range and control: I think you have a certain amount of natural talent for singing.

NC: Could be, but when I was a kid I did a lot of musical theater; and I *was* singing a lot before I played the trombone. My mom was instilling really good technique in me without explaining it, *per se*, and without my realizing how important that was going to be later.

But also, a big part of developing the singing was just embracing the kind of voice I have. When I was trying to do musical theater, I hated my voice because it was so soft and subtle: I couldn't belt out exciting numbers like my peers did. For a while, I was totally turned off by singing and gave up. Once I started playing more jazz and writing music for myself that fit my voice, it really opened it all up and made me feel like a lot more was possible. I wasn't hindered by my voice anymore because I wasn't trying to be my idea of what a singer should be but instead finding what was natural for me and just going with that.

KLW: You did ballet in your youth, and I've heard you love classical music. Have you ever played classical trombone?

NC: I definitely studied classical trombone technique in high school. I worked with Hall Goff, a great trombonist in the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra. Actually, there's this weekly trombone-quartet hang in San Francisco that my dad does with Hall; and sometimes when I'm in town I get to sub. It's primarily classical and new music and maybe a couple of jazz tunes thrown in there, and it's really fun. I love the impressionist music that I mostly listen to these days. I do love to practice Bach cello suites because I find them really challenging and beautiful to play—also contemporary composers who are influenced by classical music, such as Guinga, who is a big influence of mine. He's a Brazilian composer that I worked with at a camp, and his music is definitely very inspired by French impressionist composers and also by The Great American Songbook.



Natalie's early days with dad (in a music uniform) and trombone

Genres & Silos

KLW: You've talked before about the idea of genres disappearing because there is so much mixing going on. Yet on the other hand you found that when you were going out to tour with the Trey Anastasio Band (TAB), your work was devalued while in school at MSM: they didn't give you the same support they would to students playing straight-ahead jazz or classical music. Do you find there is a bias in institutions of music education or perhaps a disconnect with what is happening out in the world? Do institutions only focus on what happened in the past and thus are perhaps blind to what is happening now?

NC: Yeah, I definitely felt that way at the time. I'm sure vestiges of that remain; but I do have to say that friends of mine who are now teaching at MSM or The New School are starting to adapt and adjust and make more room for musicians coming in to feel like the jazz world isn't as small as music before 1970 [laughs]. I felt like the more modern music wasn't really represented in my time there; but from what I've heard, it's become more even-keeled.

At the time it was really frustrating. I was a really good student in my first year at MSM with this great performance opportunity of touring with TAB: I felt completely stuck

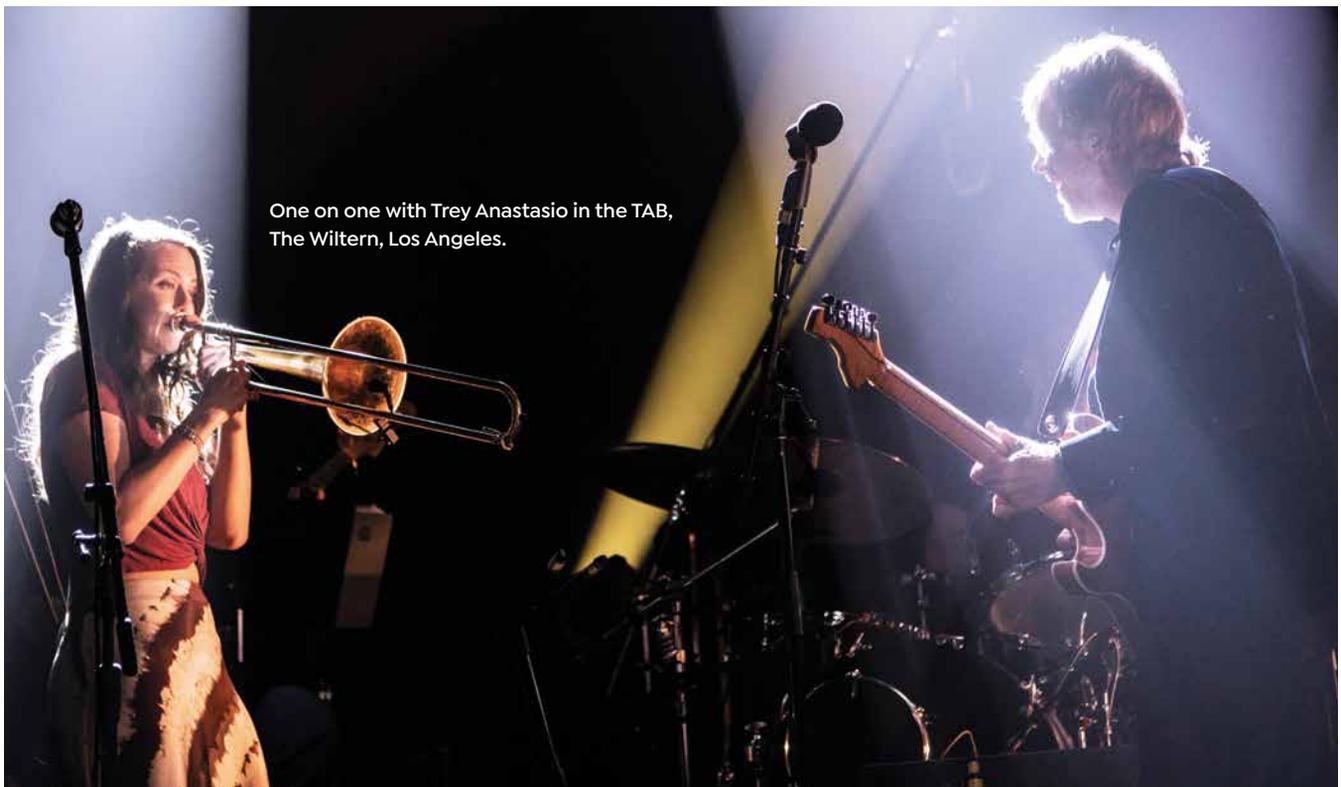
in a bind, not really able to please the Dean, even though I felt that the touring was so valuable and would set me up for having a career the second that I graduated. Being able to transition into music full-time is not an easy thing; and I think playing with Trey and meeting people outside the jazz community really helped me diversify what I was able to do, to develop skills that I was previously lacking that helped me be able to work and create more music later on.

KLW: Many people in music institutions of higher education would use the term "commercial music" to describe what you were playing on that tour.

NC: Yeah, definitely.

KLW:How do you feel about that term?

NC: The meaning is so much dependent on who's using it. What I deem commercial music is probably different than the next musician, and that can be incredibly frustrating. I even invited the Dean to come to see us play at the Beacon Theater because, if he had come, he would have seen me play different grooves in world music, some very intricate horn-section stuff, soloing on rhythm changes, taking a feature



One on one with Trey Anastasio in the TAB, The Wiltern, Los Angeles.



Dad Jeff sits in on Natalie's gig with the Trey Anastasio Band at the Fox Theater in Oakland.

on a song with a Brazilian group—stuff that is definitely not related to commercial music in any way, shape, or form and directly related to what they were trying to instill in me at MSM.

That's the problem with genres: Trey Anastasio is known as a jam band artist, and I don't even know what that would mean to someone like the Dean. It doesn't give you a great sense of all he is doing and creating; so it felt like they just lumped him in together with any generic pop gig, which is not what it was. I was heavily featured; the music was incredibly challenging; and I was memorizing eighty tunes a tour: all stuff that MSM was preaching as very important things to develop—and I was doing it *on top of* all my school work.

KLW: Given that schools of music can be kind of siloed in hard-and-fast genres, how do you teach someone to do something like you do? How would you train for a career path such as yours?

NC: Yeah, that's a really good question. I wish I could answer it with a few words. I'll say this: once my students are comfortable with me and I ask them what they like to listen to, they'll give me a list of artists very far removed from jazz. What I would do is encourage any upcoming musicians to really let those influences shine through in their music, even in the jazz world or beyond. It doesn't have to fit into that box: it can be a hybridization of all your different influences.

Just because you like a pop song with three chords, with a beautiful melody and great lyrics, it doesn't mean that's disconnected from what you're studying in school. If anything, I feel like the most exciting artists today are harnessing influences from many, many different sources, fusing them together in a way that we haven't heard before. The energy of just being your truest self will lead you to exciting things in music, and you'll find the people who appreciate you for you and understand where you're coming from musically. I always try to urge my students to eliminate the disconnect between their listening outside of school—what they listen to for pleasure—and their studies. That's something they can be transcribing and analyzing.

KLW: What were some of the most useful elements that came from your time at the Manhattan School of Music?

NC: Definitely meeting the peer group of musicians my age who were just playing at an inspiringly high level. A lot of us are still playing music professionally and writing

music in very diverse avenues of the music world. Despite the curriculum, a lot of us were able to let those outside influences seep in a little more. The years I was there, a lot of people were really listening to many styles of music and really respecting music that may be harmonically simpler than jazz; so they're bringing all this depth and creativity to those styles of music, and it ends up enriching everyone's world view in a way.

I think the opportunity to study arranging and orchestration was really valuable. I almost wish I had taken more advantage of writing for large ensembles because as a busy adult it's logistically challenging to get a bunch of strings together to record or perform your project. Back then, people were just willing to try out each other's music for free; so that was beautiful.

So mostly it was my peers, my private teachers, and the focus on writing because I didn't really write much before I went to college—that's now definitely an important part of the records I've put out.

Pedagogy

KLW: Can you talk a little bit about your teaching?

NC: With my schedule of touring, I'm not really the best candidate for teaching young kids; but I have done it. I've really enjoyed the clinics and festivals that I've been doing more of lately for college and high school-level players. Working with these extra-motivated young musicians has been really rewarding and inspiring. I will say that I love teaching by ear with my students because with so many trombonists, the big step between being a beginner and more intermediate/advanced is developing their ear-to-horn connection. I have students that can read great and have some facility but have a hard time learning melodies by ear; so I do a lot of that. I end up playing a lot in lessons and get to revisit melodies that I love.

KLW: What are some of your methods for teaching ear-training as applied to the trombone?

NC: We do a lot of scale patterns on the major scales so that they can identify the sound of each note in the scale and start referring to them by numbers instead of the note-names. That just makes everyone just a little more mentally nimble to recognize the patterns and what they're hearing. I don't have a strategic method because all of my students are so different: some can just pick it up right away, no questions; and others



Sitting in and trading with dad Jeff on Santana's set (second from right, in black) at The New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

I really kind of have to lead along at first. I have them sing it; and if they are having a really hard time on the horn but are singing it correctly, I say: "See how that note goes down, but it's a smaller interval? You're singing it correctly; so you've got that sound in your head. Now you just have to match that on the horn." That's something I do a lot, but I don't have any magic trick.

I think it really helps to meet them halfway doing something like that with a song that they are familiar with, a song that they love, because it is so satisfying to them when they can play it with their eyes closed without relying on the paper and eventually express themselves through the music. It helps me kind of prove the validity of the exercise in the end because they are so happy that they can play a song that they love.

When I studied with Wycliffe, who is a great singer as well as trombonist, he would really dig down on the principle that if you can sing it, you can play it. If you have a clear sense of what you want in your mind's ear, then usually being able to play it follows soon thereafter—and if not, it's a technical thing that we can address. The idea of getting that awareness of how things *sound* is so important. I think relating it back to singing can be such a good tactic because everyone can sing a little bit, whether they think they can or not.

KLW: So how do you see yourself fitting into the trombone-playing community? Do you do conferences like the Jazz Educator's Network or the International Trombone Festival?

NC: I'm notoriously very bad at more structured networking opportunities like those; so I haven't put myself out there as much. I feel that the music I make is very grassroots, very

"indie," for lack of a better word; and if you're not a straight-ahead jazz, commercial, or classical musician, it can be very hard to figure out where you fit in. That being said, I do love to teach; and I love playing with other trombonists; so maybe I should gear myself up for doing more of such conferences in the future.

Equipment

KLW: This is the *ITA Journal*; so tell me about your setup and how you came to it.

NC: It's very simple. I play a King 3B from the early '60s with a Bach 7C mouthpiece. That's been my setup for my basically my whole career. I've tried out other horns and keep coming back to the one I know best. The trombone had belonged to my dad: it was a spare one in the closet and became mine when I started playing. He originally got it from Marty Weiner, another amazing Bay Area trombonist with whom I took lessons.

KLW: That's crazy: I got my early '60s King 3B from *my* dad; and it's still my gig-horn! Can I take from that answer that you are not an equipment junkie?

NC: No, I don't have that trait in me. I know a lot of trombonists who really love to talk shop and are always searching for the next piece of equipment. I just don't have that same approach. For me, my trombone feels very much connected to me. When I play other horns, I find my time and focus are more occupied with trying to dissect what components come together to give me my sound rather than with the making of the music and singing through the horn.

Gender Equity

KLW: I hear a lot that not many girls play the trombone. It's a common comment when people see me play; but in my experience as a teacher, I don't really see that much of a difference. I think it's more that a lot of girl trombone players are discouraged from *continuing*. We've seen so many stories through the #MeToo movement about how young female musicians can be preyed upon by their mentors and peers. What are your thoughts on that?

NC: It's so universal that we've all dealt with the comments about the horn being bigger than we are and that not a lot of girls play the trombone. I get that all the time: a lot of people find it surprising that a woman is playing the trombone. That being said, I look at the generation younger than me; and I see it being way more representative of women.

I went to a high school where my whole trombone section was female. I didn't think it was weird that I was a woman playing the trombone. It was only really in my college years that I started to feel the difference in how I was treated because of being a woman; and it was frustrating. But now, not being that kind of naïve 18-year-old girl, I feel this responsibility to just try and be as excellent as I can be to show people that we can do it—and that we can do it for our music alone, not for our looks or our gender. We're not this token member of the band.

Sometimes people will describe my playing as feminine. At first I found that as kind of a back-handed compliment because I wanted to be just like the boys; but I think there's something really powerful in showing that side of the horn, showing people the many different attitudes and aspects you can have as a musician. You don't have to be this larger-than-life personality, relying on antics just trying to excite the audience with the tried-and-true method of playing higher, louder, and faster. That's great, too; but I do enjoy being a feminine voice on the trombone. I don't do it consciously; it's just who I am. I think showing that side of the trombone helps open the door a little wider for people who have a different personality or are soft-spoken or just whoever you are or however you want to be: there's more than one way to do it on the trombone or on any instrument in any style of music.

KLW: You know, I never had a female trombone teacher; and I wish I would have had that opportunity. The closest I got in high school was going to see Barbara Butler play the trumpet in the Eastman Brass Quintet.

NC: Yeah, just us being out here doing it is helping the newer generation feel like there is a place for them in this music.

Natalie's World

Web Sites

<https://www.nataliecressman.com>

<https://trey.com/projects/tab/>

<https://thetownhall.org/the>

Select Discography

AS A LEADER:

SETTING RAYS OF SUMMER (CRESSMAN MUSIC), 2019 with Ian Faquini

TRACES-EP (CRESSMAN MUSIC), 2017

ETCHINGS IN AMBER (CRESSMAN MUSIC), 2016 with Mike Bono

TURN THE SEA (CRESSMAN MUSIC), 2014

UNFOLDING (CRESSMAN MUSIC), 2012: Natalie Cressman and Secret Garden

AS A SIDE MUSICIAN:

THE CHER SHOW, Original Broadway Cast Recording (Warner Bros Records), 2019

ASSEMBLY OF SHADOWS (Soundspore Records), 2019: Remy LeBoeuf

BIG BOAT (JEMP Records), 2016: Phish

BRIGHTER FUTURE 2016: Big Gigantic - Featured vocalist on "No Apologies"

PAPER WHEELS (ATO Records), 2015: Trey Anastasio

I COLORED IT IN FOR YOU (M.O.D. Technologies), 2014: Sparkler

TRAVELER (ATO Records), 2012: Trey Anastasio

NEW CONSTELLATIONS: LIVE IN VIENNA (Accurate Records), 2007: Josh Roseman Unit

IT IS WRITTEN (ACT), 2005: Peter Apfelbaum

KLW: But until our numbers come into more parity, what advice would you give to men who want to be allies in helping a woman feel comfortable if she is the only one on the bandstand?

NC: The whole kind of falling off of the female population starts in those high school years, when gender seemingly starts to be more relevant. I was very lucky to have a group of guys really include me actively in their plans outside of band. They would hang out at lunch and ask: “Hey, do you want to come work on this tune?” “Do you want to write something?” “Do you want to do this gig that I have?” I don’t think they were doing it just because I was a woman, but I never felt left out in high school. I felt like I had this group of guys that was treating me like one of them. That really made me leave all that self-conscious BS at the door and just work on music with an open and humble attitude, and I got a lot better in those years.

Sometimes in college we get left out because it’s still that divide: they think we’re cute—“She’s a girl, and we want to talk about guy stuff.” Then, when we’re left out socially, it’s hard to keep up and feel like you’re a part of the group.

So I would ask male allies to be very outgoing about inviting women to be a part of the conversation musically. Sometimes there are things that are said and done that might make us uncomfortable; then we aren’t as likely to put ourselves out there, being more assertive in taking those opportunities to play. I really appreciated the guys in my life inviting me to be part of it. That helped keep me from getting discouraged even when, obviously, comments come and go. Even professors at my school would make me feel bad about being a woman. But my friends helped keep me from getting discouraged and giving up. That’s something guys of all ages, even in middle school, can do to help their female counterparts to feel included, stay involved, be assertive, and not be shy because they are women and don’t feel comfortable.

KLW: Everyone just wants a little respect, right?

NC: Yeah. It’s just that communication of: “We want you to be here. We want to hear what you have to say.” That can help make the whole difference.

The Future

KLW: What would you say to a young person who is considering a career in music right now—and has the pandemic changed your views?

NC: I think everyone needs to find where they fit into the world. I would never discourage anyone who wanted to be a musician; but I would say realistically, it’s going to be a lot of work. There are no guarantees. Even when you do start being very successful, that doesn’t mean it’s going to stay that way. A lot of us learned during the pandemic that whatever plans we had for the year were not really in our control.

It’s going to be hard; there are going to be a lot of unknown variables. But if you love it, it’s going to drive you through those tough times. As we’ve seen, non-musicians can get laid off, too. That instability is just non-stop for musicians. So we have to be smart: I always treat every gig, every tour, every opportunity not like it will be my last but that I can’t expect it to continue. That’s definitely how my parents have lived their lives. They have a lot of great wisdom about living within your means and not taking your gigs for granted: every month is a new thing.

KLW: I’ve really enjoyed your pandemic livestreams with Ian Faquini and others including your dad. Now that live gigs are coming back, what’s ahead?

NC: Ian and I finished the duo album we were working on. We’re playing locally around California in June and have a summer run of shows on the east coast—including the rescheduled date of the concert at Strathmore in Bethesda, where you and I were supposed to meet! We plan to tour in early 2022.

Besides our single “Already There” and the video last spring, we released one more music video in May: a cover of a famous Brazilian song, “Tenho Sede,” which translates to “I’m Thirsty.” It speaks of how love is as essential as water, and I hope everyone enjoys this rendition and feels the love.

Trombonist Kirsten Lies-Warfield did her undergraduate work at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. She then earned a Master of Music degree from Indiana University, where she studied with M. Dee Stewart. In 1999 she became the first woman trombonist ever hired by the U.S. Army Band “Pershing’s Own.” In 2009, she took the helm of the American Trombone Workshop’s National Solo Competition and doubled its size over the next two years. Now retired from the Army Band, she keeps busy freelancing in the Washington, DC, area. She is currently second trombone with the Arlington Philharmonic and a regular member of the contemporary music group Great Noise Ensemble and the ethno funk band Black Masala. As an educator, she teaches low brass students at Episcopal High School and through Full Blown Trombone, LLC. Ms. Warfield also is an active composer-performer, writing and performing works for local and national audiences.

Natalie Cressman's solo on "That Kind"

transcription by Kirsten Lies-Warfield

analysis by Antonio J. García, ITAJ Associate Jazz Editor

Natalie Cressman's composition "That Kind" is an even-eighth, half-time-feel funky tune from her self-released album UNFOLDING. Her trombone solo provides a breadth of expression that spans one-chord and complex-progression harmony with lyrical ease, even as meters change. Kirsten Lies-Warfield's transcription shows that Cressman's background in jazz, jam, and commercial bands, anchored by vocal experience, makes for a solo that sounds easy on the ear yet is challenging to construct.

The Tune, The Solo

The melody of the tune is backed by a series of rapidly shifting harmonies, presented in an environment of evolving metric modulations and cross-rhythms that appeal to the listener but are advanced in concept. Thus the solo sections (first sax, then trombone) begin with a contrasting release: a one-chord, Em(Maj7) open section in which the soloist and partners can take a breath and decide how to comment on what has just transpired. On cue, they shift the solo section to the complex harmonies and time-shifting that had characterized the peaks of the tune, thereafter giving way to either the next soloist or the ensemble. Thus the double-bars assigned to the transcription's Em(Maj7) section are arbitrary afterthoughts prompted by listening to the recorded musical partnership.

Throughout the solos, not a V-I or cycle of fifths is to be found: chordal movements are by half-step, whole step, often in descending minor thirds, frequently morphing between minor and major structures (no dominant chords), and made all the more excitable by their positioning within syncopated rhythms and metric modulations—a great contrast to the one-chord section that opens the solos.

Rhythmic Dance

It's easy to connect Cressman's lyricism with her alter ego as vocalist. Yet what's most striking to me is her rhythmic flow, which I venture to associate more as stemming from her early love and pursuit of dance (as well as her subsequent music training and career). The push and pull of her lines, both as composer and soloist, prompt very visual moves to at least this listener and challenge us all to explore our own potential for rhythmic fluidity. In this solo she offers a banquet of duple, triple, and sixteenth-based phrases, double-time syncopations, superimpositions of three over four and vice-versa, and—within the 6/8 sections—ability to divide the measures differently as she wishes. The second half of this solo would look at home on the music stand of a classical trombonist performing a contemporary composition for the concert hall, while her recurring rhythmic themes invite the listener into her lines. And, having playfully positioned such independent rhythms through so much of her solo, she partners rhythmically in the last eight bars with the background horns and then bass line.

Dynamics, Timbre, Range, & Tonality

Natalie is unafraid to explore the softest volumes, then rise and fall quickly or gradually, heightening the sense of spontaneous conversation infused in this solo. She is no one-color funk soloist dynamically or in timbre, choosing to glissando at choice moments that contrast with the clean edges of her more defined phrases.

Speaking of clean, Cressman demonstrates mastery of the harmonies underneath. As she traverses the two and a half-octave range of her solo, nearly every pitch is easily recognizable as within the canon of bop or bluesy vocabulary, yet issued in a way that is uniquely hers. A hallmark of her trombone-voice is easy control of the lower-range, used far less by many soloists.

Angles & Lines

Cressman opens her solo with arpeggios that outline an Em9(Maj7) chord. By m. 7 she adds the upper extensions (13th, 11th), later incorporating a bluesy flat-five. M. 14 retains the emphasis on chord tones plus occasional half-step neighbors. Bar 17 marks her first strong departure: the D# diminished sound serves as vii-tension superimposed over the underlying i-chord (Em); and twice in that bar she employs Ab/G# as a neighbor or extension, defying any expected limitations of an Em chord. M. 19 returns to Em outlines; mm. 22-25 emphasize the 9th (F#), followed by lines in E minor with some occasional half-steps.

With the arrival of new harmony in m. 38, Natalie stays largely within the chord structures on to the end (excepting m. 44, where a sequence of rhythm and direction sell her intention). Coupled with her rock-solid rhythmic dance over the shifting time signatures, this section of her solo exudes confidence, carrying into the final 4/4 section at m. 61, where she mimics the rhythms of the background horns' lines she'd created as the composer.

Pace

Pacing one's solo well is one benchmark of musical maturity. Soloists on funky tunes, particularly charts that linger on one chord for a while, often face a challenge different than soloists over bebop changes (which tend to force a certain momentum). Natalie's pacing is born of the kind of experience that makes the result seem effortless. Starting with two- to four-bar phrases that feel relaxed while locking in the time feel, she migrates by m. 14 to more double-time intensity and within phrases as long as six bars.

Sustaining that level of activity prompts a balanced, melodic step back at m. 38, when the harmony intensifies more into the foreground. There she begins a phrase on beat one for only the second time in her solo—something she returns to seven more times during the remainder of her statement (and heralded at m. 57). When the 6/8 meter arrives at m. 45, she divides it 3+3, 4+4 (m. 46), all upbeats (m. 58), and 3+1.5+1.5 (m. 60), all lending a sense of urgency to her lines as she aims towards the end of her solo. And having already played the highest note of her solo in m. 19, she raises energy in this latter section by repeatedly employing octave and a half leaps before hitting a near-highest note at m. 57. Cressman packs her 6/8 thoughts confidently right into the last sixteenth-note low A# of m. 60 that then leaps nearly two octaves to meet the background horns in 4/4 at m. 61.

Find this and the other tracks of her album UNFOLDING on Spotify, YouTube, Bandcamp, Apple Music, Amazon, and other platforms; and of course learn more about her within Kirsten Lies-Warfield's interview of Cressman here in the ITAJ, where you can find a selected discography of other recorded work.

~~Kirsten Lies-Warfield's bio appears earlier.~~ Trombonist, vocalist, composer, and educator **Antonio García** is Director of Jazz Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. He is Secretary of The Midwest Clinic and Associate Jazz Editor of the [International Trombone Association Journal](#). His newest book, *Jazz Improvisation: Practical Approaches to Grading* (Meredith Music), explores improv-course objectives and grading. His book with play-along CD, "Cutting the Changes: Jazz Improvisation via Key Centers" (Kjos Music) offers musicians of all ages standard-tune improv opportunities using only their major scales. E-mail him at ajgarcia@vcu.edu; visit his website at www.garciamusic.com.

NATALIE CRESSMAN'S TROMBONE SOLO ON "THAT KIND"

RELEASED ON UNFOLDING (SELF-RELEASED), 2012

COMPOSED BY NATALIE CRESSMAN

TRANSCRIBED BY KIRSTEN LIES-WARFIELD

♩ = 90, EVEN EIGHTHS

EDITED BY ANTONIO J. GARCÍA

E mi^{9(ma7)}

The musical score is written in bass clef, 4/4 time, and E minor. It consists of 12 staves of music. The first staff begins with a dynamic marking of *mf* and includes a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff starts at measure 4 and ends with a dynamic marking of *f*. The third staff is marked with a circled '7' and starts at measure 7, featuring a dynamic marking of *mf*. The fourth staff starts at measure 10 and includes a dynamic marking of *mp*. The fifth staff is marked with a circled '14' and starts at measure 14, with dynamics ranging from *p* to *mf*. The sixth staff starts at measure 17 and includes a circled '19' and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The seventh staff starts at measure 20. The eighth staff starts at measure 23 and includes a dynamic marking of *f*. The ninth staff starts at measure 26. The tenth staff is marked with a circled '29' and starts at measure 29, with a dynamic marking of *f*. The score includes various articulations such as accents, slurs, and breath marks, as well as triplet markings.

© 2012 NATALIE CRESSMAN

33 *mp* *f* *mp* *f*

36 *f* *mf*

38 *G min⁷ A^b maj⁷* *G min⁷ A^b maj⁷*

41 *f* *mf*

G min⁷ A^b maj⁷ *D⁹ sus* *B maj⁹*

45 *G* *E min⁶* *G maj^{7(b5)}* *F maj^{7(b5)}* *G maj^{7(b5)}* *A ma^{7(b5)}* *F maj⁷* *A^b maj⁷*

D^{b6}

49 *f*

51 *G min⁷ A^b maj⁷*

53 *G min⁷ A^b maj⁷* *G min⁷ A^b maj⁷*

57 *D min^{7(b5)} B triad* *G* *E min⁷* *G maj^{7(b5)}* *F maj^{7(b5)}* *G ma^{7(b5)}* *A ma^{7(b5)}* *B ma^{7(b5)}*

mf

61 *f* *ff* *f* *mp* *f*

E mi *E min^{9(maj7)}* *E mi* *E min^{9(maj7)}* *E mi* *E min^{9(maj7)}* *E mi* *E min^{9(maj7)}*

65 *E mi* *E min^{9(maj7)}* *E mi* *E min^{9(maj7)}* *E mi* *E min^{9(maj7)}* *E mi* *E min^{9(maj7)}*

mf

- THAT KIND -



The Quiet One

NATALIE CRESSMAN is a trombonist who's also a singer/songwriter, an individualist who's super-tight with her family, and a multifaceted artist who gets radical by turning down the volume

By A.D. Amorosi

LAUREN DESBERG

If we're going out on a limb and calling the music that trombonist, vocalist, and songwriter Natalie Cressman makes—as soloist, as side-and-session person, in a duet setting with Brazilian guitarist Ian Faquini—“conversational,” we must describe what's being said, what its tone implies, and how “conversation” itself signifies the ties that bind: in other words, family.

Let's take Cressman and Faquini's new album, *Auburn Whisper*, as an example. On “Already There,” the duo uses the convivial but intentional sotto voce that lovers do, playing off each other's sense of calm and closeness. Cressman's vocal is clarion-clear but there's a quaver in it that makes it a perfect counterpart to the warm, relaxed breathiness of her trombone. Whether in multitracked harmony or solo, her brass playing is emotive and free, occasionally tough, always tender.

That Cressman and Faquini are a couple in both music and life will likely come as no surprise to anyone who hears this music. But it may not be obvious at first that their conversation includes other family members as well. *Auburn Whisper* was recorded and mixed by Jeff Cressman at Sandy Cressman's Bay Area studio during the COVID-19 quarantine. Jeff Cressman spent nearly 20 years as Santana's trombonist and has worked as a session player for Flora Purim and Tito Puente. Sandy Cressman is an avatar of Brazilian vocal jazz and a collaborator with pianist Marcos Silva, Aíro Moreira's longtime pianist/mentor. Sandy and Jeff also happen to be Natalie Cressman's parents.

“Having an amazing trombonist for a father meant tagging along to his gigs, even having him drag me out on stage with him when I was a baby,” the younger Cressman says during a hang with Faquini's family in Vitória, capital of Brazil's Espírito Santo province. “My mom, too. I spent forever being part of who she was as a singer, on stage and off. Both of my parents' music has been a part of me since birth.”

Are her family connections strong and deeply influential to her work? Absolutely. But at the same time, she's a rugged individualist who's far from exclusively Latin-centric; in addition to her collaborations with Faquini, she plays in Broadway pit orchestras and has jam-band cred as part of Phish guitarist Trey Anastasio's ensemble. Make no mistake: Natalie Cressman's doing her own thing.

Starting life in northern California, the young Cressman came up in various music camps. She got “inducted into the tribe of trombonists” at age eight, with her father and famed “bone man” Wayne Wallace as her earliest teachers. Despite her lineage, taking up the instrument could easily have been awkward, but “what saved me from any weirdness,” she says, “is that I am, admittedly, partially a nerd, and that what I was doing with the trombone wasn't connected to marching bands, say, in high school.”

Watching her father play in salsa bands—“dance music where young people reacted positively to the trombone”—provided Cressman with a unique idea of what a brass instrument could be. “Plus, he played with Santana, which gave him rock-star status. The trombone was never a corny instrument. I saw how it could have a place in every style.”

Cressman is also quick to state that much of her work as a singer/songwriter was inspired by her mother. In particular, she fondly recalls rehearsals of Sandy's vocal trio Pastiche. “So much of what I do with my own projects, as well as when I tour with Trey Anastasio, comes down to being agile at creating vocal harmonies,” she says. “That totally comes from my mom's work, as well as her being a source of wisdom. Having been harmonizing with her since I was a kid primed me for doing this as an adult. Also, there's her love of Brazilian music, which has been so much of a component for what I do. Records such as Dori Caymmi's *Brazilian Serenata*, Antônio Carlos Jobim's *Tom* collaboration albums, and pretty much all MPB [Música Popular Brasileira] were part of my daily household listening. I think I was born to that Dori Caymmi record.”

Currently at the beginning stages of recording a new album (“celebrating the work of Milton Nascimento with Natalie as my trombonist”), Sandy Cressman believes that the spirits of Brazilian music trailed her for decades before she made her first solo disc, 1999's *Homenagem Brasileira*.

“Pop radio growing up meant that you heard artists such as Stevie Wonder and Sérgio Mendes' *Brasil '66*,” she says. “I was blown away by that sound. While in college, I studied Latin jazz. While we were dating, my husband introduced me to Wayne Shorter's *Native Dancer* album with Nascimento. I can remember hearing Ivan Lins' music played before Pat Metheny concerts. That music got into

my blood.” It also got into her voice, a softly expressive instrument made for the cottony cool of bossa nova and the quietest of Tropicalia-inspired jazz. Along with co-writing her own deeply felt material on self-released albums such as *Brasil—Sempre no Coração* and *Entre Amigos*, she passed the MPB gene onto her daughter big-time.

Sandy fondly remembers those Pastiche rehearsals too. “She used to come with me and sit in her car-seat basket, singing,” she says of Natalie. “By the time she got to kindergarten choir, she was a ringer as she could hold harmonies. Her ear has always been really good—as a vocalist and as a trombonist. You have to have a great ear to tune an instrument with a slide ... Her vocal phrasing is a plus when it comes to phrasing music on the trombone. People who hear Natalie and I hear similarities in our voices, definitely. I do too. I also think that Natalie has taken it way beyond with her beautiful high register that's different from the timbre of my voice, to say nothing of having her own style.”

As for Natalie's partnership with Faquini ... well, even that has a family link. “My mother collaborated with Ian first,” she explains, “when he was a 20-year-old student at the California Jazz Conservatory for one of her duos. Then I collaborated with Ian on one of her projects, and then we kept at it. I owe her a debt for that introduction as well,” she adds with a laugh.

Cressman never felt pushed into music by her mom and dad. Instead, she was offered the keys to the kingdom as a life and work option. “My parents helped, but the real motivation came from me,” she says. “It was up to me to carve out whatever life I wanted, rather than sit through the expectation of my parents while finding myself.”

That process of self-location included, in her youth, ballet lessons and musical theater. The latter remains a huge part of her life to this day; she sat in the trombone chair and appears on the original Broadway cast recording of *The Cher Show*, was part of director Baz Luhrmann's *La Bohème* on the Great White Way, and plays in the pit orchestra of *Hadestown* (see pg. 19). “The trombone chair has a pretty big role in that show,” she says of the Tony Award-winning hellscape musical. “I love show tunes.”

Cressman has also been a heroine to jam-band fans everywhere since she was 19. That was when she received an invitation from Trey Anastasio to join

his solo band. The Phish guitarist had first met her the previous year, just after she'd moved to New York to study jazz at Manhattan School of Music; Bay Area multi-instrumentalist Peter Apfelbaum was a mutual friend. His offer, in Cressman's words, “busted the door wide open” to other possibilities in improvised music. Since then, she's played frequently with Anastasio, both in his own group and as a live guest with Phish.

“I had to do a lot of homework to get to the root of [Anastasio's] music, to feel authentic,” Cressman says. Assignments included imbibing Bruce Fowler's trombone work with Frank Zappa and feeling

out the funk between James Brown and Fred Wesley. “I found my identity within all that new music, then made sure I had my own voice. That crowd—the Grateful Dead, Phish and Trey audience—has a voracious appetite for all sorts of music. That's exciting because you can see and feel how music can bring people together. That's a nice thing for humanity, bringing people happiness through music.

“It wasn't as if I ever turned my back on the roots of those Brazilian records and the salsa bands I sat in with a kid,” she adds. “But once I started playing trombone at a certain level, I took in

“I used to feel this pressure to be louder, more aggressive. Maybe to fit in with the male energy of my peers at the time. Now I'm older and wiser and I know I can do the softer volumes.”



TOMAS FAQUINI



Jazz al fresco with Ian Faquini (R)

began making the cosmopolitan folk-pop of Joni Mitchell, early Paul Simon, and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young part of her regular diet. Introspectiveness, literacy, and nuance have played ever larger roles in her recent music.

“The manner in which Joni collaborated with jazz players of her time, to say nothing of her storytelling abilities ... I’ve been trying to find someone who excites me as much as her,” Cressman says. “[She] creates amazing, unique pictures with sound. Unforgettable sound, at that. Getting that blend right is something that I try over and over again.”

As she came into her own and broadened horizons, what excited Cressman most at the beginning of her life—world music and world languages (even studying French while at a French-American school)—mixed and mingled with her newfound influences. “Even though I had moved away from it for a minute, my life’s deep dive into Portuguese [-language] music only got deeper as time went on,” she says.

It turned out, not all that surprisingly, that the music Cressman loved had also been crucial to her partner Faquini’s upbringing. Their mutual fondness for

American singer/songwriters and Brazilian music defines their albums together (*Auburn Whisper* and 2019’s *Setting Rays of Summer*), then pushes them into a wholly original place. That trademark equatorial subtlety of song structure brings out the open-endedness of Cressman’s lyric writing.

“Jazz has amazing harmonic and melodic diversity, but rhythmically, Brazilian music offers something off the beaten path and open ... and, as a lyricist, depicting things in a way that’s not so completely tangible, where the listener gets to make their own conclusions about what each

TOMAS FAQUINI

song could mean to them, that’s definitely a part of our writing,” Cressman acknowledges. “Pop songs in the present usually spell things out. They say the same thing over and over again. I wanted to find a different way of talking about things that permeate the human experience, making them feel fresh, and that go with our melodies. I never want to overwrite a song. I just want to translate what I’m hearing and feeling into a story, into something that jells.”

Along with the previously discussed “Already There” and *Auburn Whisper*’s title track (think Charlie Byrd by way of

“The Grateful Dead, Phish and Trey [Anastasio] audience has a voracious appetite for all sorts of music. That’s exciting because you can see and feel how music can bring people together.”

Fairport Convention), Cressman points at the new album’s Hitchcock tribute “Rear Window” as the kind of story—“precise, but a little bit opaque”—that she savors as a writer. “These scenes of loneliness that were so relevant during the pandemic, a longing to go with the purity of the melody ... I wanted to include that, tell you something without giving everything away.”

Ah yes, the pandemic, which brought sadness and loss to many but which made the recording of *Auburn Whisper* a relaxed experience indeed. Cressman and Faquini got to work with the former’s parents in a home backyard setting, and there was plenty of time to put together dynamic arrangements for multiple trombones and voices. “It was an organic collaboration with no deadline or contract,” Cressman says. “There’s a lot more of my writing on *Auburn Whisper*. Ian spurred me on to break the concept of the trombone choir throughout the new album. That made me part of the melody-writing process along with Ian, as well as the lyricist. More than our first record together, *Auburn Whisper* is the sum total of our influences and abilities, and thoroughly collaborative.”

From *Unfolding* to *The Traces* to *Auburn Whisper*, Cressman has been taking jazz as an expressive tool and quietly deviating from its traditions. She’s anxious to

continue. “I want to explore and see what settles while feeling authentic to who I am at the time,” she says. “Where I am now, I feel as if I’ve stripped away some layers, and am even more of myself than ever. There are so many parallels between who I am as a singer and who I am as a trombonist. But I think that I’m getting to a point, now, where ... what makes my approach different is that I’m leaning into myself more. My softer textures. The subtleties of music and word. I used to feel this pressure to be louder, more aggressive. Maybe to fit in with the male energy of my peers at the time. Now I’m older and wiser and I know I can do the softer volumes. That’s what makes me unique. I want to bring that to a place where I can be most heard.”

Cressman is reminded that, while she was coming up, she’d get comments about how she should play trombone in a more delicate, “feminine” fashion. “And that made me so mad to hear that,” she says, laughing. “I just wanted to be accepted as one of the guys. Then, as you mature, you recognize that *that* is me. I have a different dynamic range than most trombonists that allows me to be more agile. It took growing up in my own skin to realize that my gifts are more subtle. I couldn’t play the acoustic music that I do with Ian if I wasn’t in command of such volume. I’m okay with being different now.” **JT**

Natalie Cressman & Ian Faquini: *Setting Rays of Summer* (Cressman Music)

A review of the duo album from the trombonist/vocalist and guitarist/vocalist

PUBLISHED JUNE 23, 2019 / JUNE 21, 2019 – BY ANDREW GILBERT



Some albums arrive without precedent, a world unto themselves. While bringing to mind the sophisticated, jazz-infused post-Tropicalia songs of Brazilian composers like Guinga, Milton Nascimento, and Marcos Valle, Natalie Cressman and Ian Faquini's unusual duo album *Setting Rays of Summer* sounds as fresh and revivifying as a clear mountain stream.

A guitarist, vocalist, and composer born in Brasilia and raised since childhood in Berkeley, Calif., Faquini is responsible for the voluptuously shaped compositions and lithe but orchestral guitar work. He also possesses a pleasingly reedy voice

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****RINGER OF THE WEEK****Natalie Cressman & Ian Faquini: Setting Rays of Summer

by [George W. Harris](#) • June 6, 2019 • [0 Comments](#)



Here's a gorgeous and sensuous album by the team of Natalie Cressman and Ian Faquini. Cressman sings in both English and soft Portuguese, melding her warm trombone with Faquini's gracious acoustic guitar, who also adds vocals for harmony and a couple leads. The result is an intimate and gently swaying session that melds folk, Brazilia and gentle jazz in rich combinations of a tasty curry of sounds.

Rich themes and gentle strings meld guitar and brass to lush moments as Cressman's warm nasal tone oozes on "Tere" and the folksy "Sereia." Her English lyrics create a tender troubadour mood for the delicate "Setting Rays of Summer" and "My Heart Again Will Rise" as her trombone ruminates here and on the bluesy "Museu Nacional." For His part, Faquini is impressionistic on "Uirapuru" in string and voice and having fun on the duet "Mandingueira" creating luscious harmonies for the pastoral "Debandada." Casual, unpretentious and as delicious as dipping your bread into a plate of fresh olive oil.

that blends artfully with Cressman's bright, translucent singing. She's a top-shelf trombonist who's worked with such diverse artists as Peter Apfelbaum and Phish's Trey Anastasio, and is utterly at home in MPB (musica popular brasileira), the omnivorous Brazilian movement that emerged out of bossa nova and Tropicalia at the end of the 1960s.

Cressman contributes lyrics to three of the 10 pieces, one in Portuguese and two in English, including the wistful title track that encapsulates the album's evocation of brief epiphanies, fleeting pleasures, and enduring memories. Iara Ferreira provides the Portuguese lyrics for four songs, including the levitating ballad "Debandada," rendered as a delicately intertwined duet, and the surging samba "Mandingueira." Rogerio Santos wrote the lyrics for "Lenga Lenga," which has an infectious hook worthy of a standard, and the dreamy "Uirapuru," a lovely sigh of a song. The melody of Faquini's instrumental piece "Museu Nacional" echoes the exquisite melancholy of Jobim's "O Amor em Paz," delivered with burnished intensity by Cressman's trombone.

Faquini made a vivid first impression with his 2016 debut *Metal na Madeira* featuring Rio-based vocalist Paula Santoro; that album featured his originals set to an array of Northeastern rhythms. The expert songcraft on display throughout *Setting Rays* is more than impressive, but what stands out most is the way that trombone, guitar, and two voices conjure a fully realized realm.

DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond Since 1934



Alison Lewis
DEBUT ALBUM - SEVEN

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Natalie Cressman and Mike Bono's new album is titled *Etchings In Amber*.

NATALIE CRESSMAN & MIKE BONO

Exploring New Territory

At a recent performance at Joe's Pub in New York, vocalist Natalie Cressman and acoustic guitarist Mike Bono wove unusual threads into rare shapes and sounds, their dense compositions alluding to jazz, folk and left-of-center pop. On the duo's debut album, *Etchings In Amber* (Cressman Music), crystalline vocals soar over dense acoustic guitar like a cool fall day holding onto the last rays of the setting sun.

"There's a lot of artists coming from the jazz world who are expanding its reach by bringing in [other] styles," said Cressman, 25. "It's always been an evolving art form. What I feel most comfortable doing is bringing in modern influences from my jazz background. Our music could appeal to a jazz listener who likes Joni Mitchell's *Court And Spark* period, or people our age who only listen to contemporary singer-songwriters or pop music."

Cressman—whose skilled trombone work was featured on her albums *Turn The Sea* and *Unfolding*—grew up in the San Francisco area performing in her parents' band, led by her trombone-playing father, Jeff Cressman, a longtime member of Carlos Santana's group. Aside from her duo with Bono, she also leads her own group (including Bono) and is a member of guitarist Trey Anastasio's touring band. Bono, also 25, is part of the new wave of New York players who count Ben Monder and Julian Lage as influences. *From Where You Are* was his leader debut.

Bono's angular compositions frequently challenge Cressman's vocal skills. "The pieces Mike and I collaborate on often begin as solo guitar pieces," Cressman explained. "So I'm limited by the shape of the melodies, which are very jumpy. Finding the right vowels or [crafting lyrics that] still sound like English—it can be a challenge. The limitation provides a form of innovat-

ing to find fresh words and phrases. We haven't tried setting [previously composed] words to music because I like hearing the song and feeling what I think it's about and blending the meaning and the sound of the words into the music as seamlessly as possible."

"When we started playing together and I began writing music for the duo, I wasn't necessarily writing jazz songs," Bono said. "I just follow the melodies I'm hearing. Some of them are more unusual and obscure; others are more folk-sounding. I believe Natalie follows a similar arc. Our crossover is harmonizing those melodies in a nontraditional way. The harmonies from both of our styles stem from jazz."

Cressman and Bono play a regular circuit of small clubs in and around New York, where they stretch their repertoire to include tunes from numerous genres, including Monder's "Charlotte's Song," Tove Lo's "Habits (Stay High)," Bon Iver's "Blindsided" and Norwegian vocalist Hanne Hukkelberg's "Do Not As I Do."

"I think of João Gilberto, or other artists who wrote great music on acoustic guitar with ethereal, floaty melodies," Cressman said. "Flora Purim was a big influence on me as well. That's still under the wider umbrella of jazz in my mind. Where I was raised, in the Bay Area, Brazilian and straight-ahead jazz are played as one. The musicians cross over freely."

The duo is entering intriguing musical territory with their jazz backgrounds attached.

"The acoustic guitar makes [our compositions] a little more deceiving," Bono said. "You might not realize the harmonies are as obscure as they are because you're hearing them from an instrument with a soothing timbre. It lends itself more to folk music or bossa nova. The jazz element in our music can be disguised if you don't have the ear for it."

—Ken Micallef

San Francisco Chronicle

Trombonist Natalie Cressman honors jazz pioneer

By Andrew Gilbert

Updated 4:57 pm, Wednesday, February 24, 2016



Measured by the size and scope of her musical contributions, Melba Liston is singularly qualified for the lead spot in SFJazz's celebration of Women's History Month. The trombonist-arranger came out of the Los Angeles scene in the early 1940s and immediately took her place alongside the most innovative artists of the era.

The only female horn player to perform and record with top-tier big bands — she put in serious road time with Gerald Wilson, Dizzy Gillespie and Quincy Jones — Liston made her most profound impact as an arranger, particularly through her long-running collaboration with pianist-composer Randy Weston.

Beyond jazz, Liston pioneered work in reggae and contributed gorgeous charts for **Ray Charles**, **Marvin Gaye** and the **Supremes** as an arranger for Motown in the 1960s. But she recorded only one album as a leader, and today Liston is all too often overlooked (she died in New York City in 1999 at age 73).

“For decades she was the only woman doing what she was doing,” says San Francisco native and now New York trombonist and vocalist Natalie Cressman, who pays tribute to Liston with two performances at the **SFJazz Center’s Joe Henderson Lab** on Thursday, March 3. “It feels like she should be a household name.”

Something of a trailblazer herself, the 24-year-old Cressman is the daughter of Santana trombonist and sound engineer Jeff Cressman and Brazilophile vocalist Sandy Cressman (who performs at Oakland’s Sound Room on March 18 and the **Red Poppy Art House** on March 19). A graduate of San Francisco’s **Ruth Asawa School of the Arts** public high school, Natalie played with the Monterey Jazz Festival’s **Next Generation Jazz Orchestra**, **SFJazz High School All-Stars**, Latin Jazz Youth Ensemble and other acclaimed ensembles before heading east to study at the **Manhattan School of Music** and tour with Phish’s Trey Anastasio and playing gigs with jazz stars like **Nicholas Payton** and **Peter Apfelbaum**.

Cressman, who has two albums of her own under her belt, is forging a sleek and dance-minded sound inflected by her love of Afro-Cuban, Brazilian and West African rhythms, indie rock, jazz and funk. She often divides her time between her horn and vocals in her own music, but for her Liston tribute, Cressman is focusing on instrumental material backed by a Bay Area band featuring trumpeter **Erik Jekabson**, pianist **Colin Hogan**, bassist **Tommy Folen** and drummer **Eric Garland**.

“I’m going to try to cover music spanning her whole career, including groundbreaking work with Randy Weston from the album ‘Uhuru Africa,’” Cressman says of the Liston tribute. “She primarily arranged for larger ensembles and I’ve got a quintet, so I’m trying to re-create the arrangements so that her voice really speaks.”

Though she loathed confrontation, Liston was a fierce creative combatant who succeeded on multiple fronts despite ill treatment, sometimes brutal (Liston suffered numerous sexual assaults from bandmates).

Liston often described arriving in New York City in 1949 summoned by Dizzy Gillespie, who made a point of championing great female jazz players. As the story goes, some of the men in Gillespie's big band grumbled when Liston walked into her first rehearsal, asking in loudly enough for her to hear, "What's this bitch doing here?" The trumpeter ignored their complaints and asked Liston to hand out one of her arrangements. When the band was unable to navigate the difficult chart, Gillespie smiled and said, "Who's the bitch now?"

Liston isn't a stranger to longtime Bay Area jazz fans. SFJazz's earlier incarnation, the San Francisco Jazz Festival, showcased her work with Weston in 1995. In the midst of a creative burst building on their groundbreaking jazz-meets-African-music collaborations three decades earlier, Liston was finally getting her due. On projects like 1960's "Uhuru Africa," she didn't get prominent billing despite her essential contributions, but on 1993's "Volcano Blues" (Antilles), Weston made sure her name and photo appeared alongside his on the cover.

Cressman knows she's heir to a jazz scene opened up by Liston, but she notes that female horn players still face scrutiny and skepticism.

"I've definitely felt a lot of discrimination as one of the few female trombonists on the scene," Cressman says. "Reading about Melba was like discovering this long-lost sister. I loved her no-nonsense attitude. She walked into a room and blew them away with her writing and playing."

Andrew Gilbert is a freelance writer.

Natalie Cressman Quintet: Tribute to Melba Liston: 7 and 8:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 3. \$25. SFJazz Center's Joe Henderson Lab, 201 Franklin St., S.F. (866) 920-5299. www.sfjazz.org.

The Boston Globe

Arts

Trombonist Natalie Cressman lures jam band fans to jazz

By Jeremy D. Goodwin

| GLOBE CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 06, 2014



Natalie Cressman was doing homework in her dorm room one evening during her first year at the Manhattan School of Music, where she was studying jazz trombone, when she answered the phone — and her workload suddenly got a lot heavier.

On the line was Trey Anastasio, front man of jam band behemoth Phish, who had a job for her: playing trombone and singing backup in his eponymous solo group.

In nearly five years of periodic touring behind Anastasio, she's accumulated a bunch of fans hailing from a musical world she'd never planned on wading into. Now, she's hoping to bring some of those new fans back with her — toward the realm of jazz.

“Even though it's not the fan base that I might have had if I'd just come out of a purely jazz background, I'm really happy to have these people connected to me,” Cressman, 23, says over the phone from her apartment in Brooklyn.

Fans who've seen her play with Anastasio, or sit in with other groups in the jam band scene, might be surprised by what they hear when they turn up for her solo shows. (She plays Cafe 939 with her septet on Thursday.) Though she's no traditionalist and rightly points to her outside influences, her work sits comfortably enough within the big tent of jazz.

“So much of my fans' engagement and interest has come through Trey,” she says. “It's not that they don't enjoy [my sound], but I definitely can't be at a festival where all of the bands are funk and jam-based. That's kind of a shame, just because I'd love to get my music out in front of more ears, but my own band gives me a chance to really just be me.”

After a debut album that focused mainly on instrumental music, Cressman's sophomore effort (“Turn the Sea,” released in March) introduces a new focus on her vocal ability. It's part of her effort to appeal to music fans of her own generation. “I'm just trying to bring this beautiful music into the new millennium,” Cressman says.

“I have friends my age that I have get out to see jazz,” she continues, “and they'll enjoy themselves, but they don't necessarily know what they're supposed to be listening for. I think having a strong melody and lyrics really helps because it puts it into a [familiar] language and the musical story becomes even more obvious.”

Though her singing style comes out of the tradition of vocal jazz, a contemporary feel seeps through the new record. After penultimate tune “Stolen Away” surges forward on an Afrobeat-influenced horn chart, the album closes with a remix of its title track by New York-based producer JNTHN STEIN that suggests Cressman’s latent interest in electronic music.

“I feel like Natalie’s part of a new generation of musicians who have intersected with the jazz world, but whose vocabulary is really broad,” says Peter Apfelbaum, the bandleader and a longtime family friend and musical mentor. “She has all the goods in terms of technique, but is really pan-stylistic.”

Cressman’s parents are Jeff, also a trombone player, and Sandy, a jazz vocalist with a particular interest in Brazilian music. Her father is a longtime collaborator with Santana, and once played a tour behind Anastasio.

Her parents’ connections created some unusual opportunities for Natalie, but these didn’t just result in on-off appearances for the sake of experience and resume building. When she subbed for regular trombonist Josh Roseman in Apfelbaum’s big band, the impressed leader kept her on even after Roseman returned. Jeff first suggested his daughter for the open chair in Anastasio’s group, but this earned her only an impromptu audition — which she promptly crushed.

“From the second she walked in the room, it was over,” says trumpeter/vocalist Jennifer Hartswick, who was tasked by Anastasio with auditioning Cressman in a live setting. Hartswick told Cressman to show up at an Upper East Side bar where she was playing, and had her join the band as soon as she arrived, mid-song. They meshed instantly.

“I had made plans with Trey to call him in the morning and talk to him about it, and I was like, I’m not waiting until the morning,” recalls Hartswick, who first worked with Anastasio as a teenager herself. “I called him at midnight and said, this girl is the real deal. People like to talk about the fact that she’s young and beautiful and all of that, but really, she brings a depth and a maturity to music everywhere she goes.”

As a young, female, trombone-playing bandleader, Cressman knows she stands out on multiple fronts.

“I’ve just kind of gotten used to feeling a little bit like the oddball in so many ways,” she says with a laugh, “and that’s totally fine with me.”

Natalie Cressman

The Red Room at Cafe 939, 617-747-2261. <http://www.cafe939.com>

Also performing: Paige Chaplin

Date of concert: Thursday

Ticket price: \$12

Natalie Cressman Fuses Jazz, Indie, and Jam Band Music with Sophomore Release *Turn the Sea*

Posted: 07/26/2013 6:09 pm

By Molly Fosco



If you haven't heard of [Natalie Cressman](#), you definitely will soon. A Bay Area native, born to two musician parents -- Jeff and Sandy Cressman, Natalie grew up with music in her DNA. Recently graduating from the Manhattan School of Music, she's made a name for herself in New York City as quite a talented trombone player. Natalie has now begun transitioning into more of a singer/songwriter role with the release of her second studio album *Turn the Sea*.

Generally associated with the jam band category, Natalie's skills as a trombonist have allowed her to seamlessly fit right into a variety of musical ensembles. She's had stints performing with Lettuce, Van Ghost, Dumstaphunk, and most impressively, Trey Anastasio of the ultimate legendary jam band, Phish. Touring with Trey has gained Natalie the recognition she needed to jumpstart her career, and she's definitely taking advantage of it.

Since the release of her sophomore studio album *Turn the Sea*, recorded at Candid Music Studios in Brooklyn, Natalie is bringing her music home next month on a [west coast tour](#) that kicks off August 11th at the [San Jose Jazz Festival](#). *Turn the Sea* is certainly peppered with some of the jam band essence Natalie is known for, but overall the album takes on a very different vibe than her previous release, and from the majority of performances she's given in the past. The strong jazz substance in her music has always been consistent, but this album is bursting with it more than ever. Her veteran skills as a trombonist are clear, but what's even more impressive is her vocal performance and talents as a lyricist. The sound of her voice gives each track a very indie feel to it, which compliments the jazz melodies in a very unique way. At times her lyrics almost convey a feeling of loneliness and desperation, but with the generally upbeat, colorful music that accompanies it you wouldn't know it upon first listen. Natalie's cover of Bon Iver's *Blindsided* on this album is the cheeriest version of the usually somber and melancholy song I've ever heard.

Turn the Sea ends with a remix of the title track by another Bay Area native/New York transplant, electronic artist [JNTHN STEIN](#). Still maintaining its jazz roots, the track has elements of EDM in just the right places making it discernibly the most danceable track on the album. In a recent interview with [Jamband.com](#), Natalie revealed that she's been enjoying electronic music more and more these days and has even begun to work with Abelton. Perhaps an electronic album is in her future?



Off

the barre and into the bar, Cressman's got music in her genes.

A new look for jazz: Natalie Cressman

Trombone vocalist slides into Dizzy's P.B. digs

By Dave Good, July 8, 2015

The new face of jazz (or at least one of them) has tattoos and wears yoga pants. Raised on Brazilian and Afro-Cuban rhythms, with straight-ahead instrumental chops worthy of a Wycliffe Gordon and yet equally divested enough to perform with the jam band [Phish](#), and all the while capable of laying a deep vocal read on an oldie like “Goodbye Pork Pie Hat” — say hello to [Natalie Cressman](#). Still in her 20s, Cressman reminds a listener of the high-octane Lincoln Center class and freelance spirit of [Esperanza Spalding](#), but with a trombone instead of a double bass. Is Cressman the future of jazz? No. That’s too heavy a burden to lay on any one performer.

In it, but not of it, describes the approach that Cressman and so many of her contemporaries bring to contemporary jazz. Jazz music is not doomed and will survive of its own accord. Surely there are Charlie Parker sycophants enough to ensure that the accomplishments of that

bygone era will be around for generations to come, albeit in a kind of museum setting. It's the fresh approach by young jazz players who were raised on indie rock that interest me most at present.

Naturally, Natalie Cressman's backstory includes deep music roots: her dad played 'bone in Santana and her mom is a jazz singer. An injury took Cressman out of her first love, ballet, and therefore her development as a musician began somewhat late in the game, but so be it. Consider her multitude of childhood influences a sort of cross-training, such that when she began to woodshed a music instrument in earnest, the finished result came out as if effortless. Her trombone is world-class, but her singing voice is another thing entirely, an empathic entity that channels the ages. Cressman's is a flawless act that can only get better with time and age. Yep, I smell a Grammy — someday.

The Mercury News

The Newspaper of Silicon Valley
MercuryNews.com

Natalie Cressman steps into San Jose Jazz Festival spotlight

By Richard Scheinin rscheinin@mercurynews.com San Jose Mercury News Posted: MercuryNews.com



Trombonist Natalie Cressman was just 18 when she began playing with Trey Anastasio, the guitarist and singer from the band Phish. At the same time she was starting jazz studies at the Manhattan School of Music, juggling classes with touring -- music theory at 8 a.m. after a late night onstage with a world-famous jam band.

San Francisco-bred Cressman, who performs with her own band Sunday at the San Jose Jazz Festival, has learned a lot about connecting the dots between jazz, funk, rock and more from Anastasio, and she applies a similar strategy to her own music.

"I really like finding that fine line between genres," she says. "That's where I'm most comfortable, and it's not that I'm trying not to play jazz. It's just that I like weaving styles together ... joining musical worlds."

Now 22, Cressman -- also a singer and songwriter -- springs from an impressive line of musical DNA. Mother Sandy Cressman is a well-known Brazilian-jazz vocalist; father Jeff Cressman is a recording engineer and trombonist, a longtime member of Carlos Santana's band.

Natalie, who recently played New York's Apollo Theater with Wycliffe Gordon, a superstar of jazz trombone, has released a new album mixed by her father, "Turn the Sea."

Anastasio has called her "an incredible player." Multi-instrumentalist/composer Peter Apfelbaum, a veteran genre-blender in whose band Cressman performs, says, "She just gets better every year, and she's amazingly versatile -- one of those musicians who's confident working in all kinds of styles."

Trained as a straight-ahead jazz player -- while in high school at Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts, she made pretty much all the regional and statewide all-star groups -- she extended her listening in New York to indie singers and bands, including St. Vincent and Dirty Projectors, while focusing on her own songwriting and production. Her new album is what she calls "indie jazz" -- creative improvisation meets pop soundscapes and electronically enhanced vocals.

Cressman has been "immersed in music" from the time she was born, and even before. Sandy Cressman performed throughout her pregnancy with Natalie; her water broke shortly after a performance with a salsa band.

Natalie remembers cozy family evenings at home while growing up, watching "Black Orpheus," the classic Brazilian film with music by Antônio Carlos Jobim and Luiz Bonfá. It helped form the soundtrack of her childhood, along with Brazilian singer Elis Regina and Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon ("Graceland" was a big one), the jazz fusion band Weather Report, trumpeter Miles Davis ("Kind of Blue") and pianist Thelonious Monk.

She recalls tagging along to her parents' gigs. (One popular family anecdote has her falling asleep inside a bass violin case during a show on Treasure Island.) When Natalie was about 9, her father joined Santana's band: "So I'd bring my little friends to Shoreline, and we'd get to hang out backstage," she says.

She studied trombone at summer camps, moving up through the ranks at the Stanford Jazz Workshop's annual programs, for which she has been a faculty member. Mentored as a teen by the Bay Area's top trombonists -- Wayne Wallace,

Marty Wehner, Mal Sharpe, her dad and others -- she began getting calls from Apfelbaum and percussionist Pete Escovedo.

"She started to scare me," jokes her father.

When Natalie was 18 and ready to move to New York, Jeff Cressman decided to give up his trombone spot in the Trey Anastasio Band -- and recommended his daughter as the replacement. She auditioned and won the gig, but wasn't always comfortable in her early days on the road.

"I was kind of shy, and even though I felt I was pretty well equipped to take the job," she says, "I wasn't sure how to handle myself, and I felt like I was coming across onstage as weaker and meeker than I would be if I were just playing with my friends in a practice room."

Mean-spirited bloggers didn't help; they wrote about her as if she were "fresh meat."

She stuck with it, finding there could be "a lightness to playing music" even in a pressured situation. Still performing with Anastasio, she notes that "there are so many ways to play one line of music. In Trey's band, when I'm singing, I'm blending with two or three other voices all the time, and I'm making constant adjustments to match without sticking out."

She tries to bring that same "microscopic awareness" to her own music. Her studies at the Manhattan School of Music grounded her in jazz but also included classes in orchestral arranging and East Indian ensemble playing. She graduated last spring. Now based in New York, she is beginning to explore electronic music and spending ever more time with her songs and lyrics as well as putting in the requisite hours on trombone. She recently bought a ukulele, so she can "write songs on the go."

Cressman makes "the music her muse is telling her to make," her father says. "No one has put her in a box yet. She is free to define what really rocks her world musically. With her experience and talent, there's going to be a unique sound offered to us. Who knows where it will lead?"

Details: Natalie Cressman at the San Jose Jazz Festival When: 4 p.m. Aug. 11 Where: Gordon Biersch Stage (East San Fernando Street, between First and Second streets) Tickets: Included in daily festival admission: \$20 general, \$5 ages 5 to 12; <http://jazzfest.sanjosejazz.org> Also: 8 p.m. Aug. 19, Freight & Salvage, 2020 Addison St., Berkeley; \$16.50; 510-644-2020, www.thefreight.org

Jazz Weekly

Creative Music and Other Forms of Avante Garde

www.jazzweekly.com

Natalie

Cressman & Secret Garden: Unfolding

July 27, 2012

By George W. Harris



Lesson #1: Don't judge a book by its cover. She looks like someone who's going to be doing Janice Ian covers, and the name of the group (Secret Garden) just oozes of doe-eyed female "feelings" and "relationships." Well, pop in the first song, buddy, and this lady plays a trombone (which you can barely see on the cover photo) like Curtis Fuller in drag! She and her team of Ivan Rosenberg/tp, Chad Lefkowitz-Brown/ts, Pascal Le Boeuf/key, RubenSamama/b, and Jake Goldbas/dr go through the instrumental hard boppers like "Flip" like it's a reunion of The Jazz Messengers. Yes, she does sing, but her voice has an alluring smoky quality that adds to, and not detracts from, the mood. A clever reading of "Honeysuckle Rose," gets the mood just right, and "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" is as languid as all get out. Impressive on a plethora of fronts. Surprisingly appealing.

San Francisco Chronicle

Natalie Cressman's talent is in her DNA

Lee Hildebrand

Published 2:39 p.m., Thursday, August 2, 2012



Natalie Cressman is, one might say, a chip off the old blocks. Like her father, Santana sideman Jeff Cressman, she plays trombone. Like her mother, jazz vocalist Sandy Cressman, she sings. She does both with aplomb on her debut CD, "Unfolding," recorded in October in Brooklyn and set for release this week on the Cressman Music label in San Francisco. Cressman, who turned 21 last month, composed seven of its nine selections and wrote richly textured horn-section charts for herself, a trumpeter and a tenor saxophonist. Her dad flew to New York to engineer the sessions. Unlike many young people who ignore or reject music their parents like, Cressman embraced the jazz, Brazilian and Afro-Cuban sounds that surrounded her while growing up in San Francisco.

"It was never forced on me, which I think is the first secret to why I'm doing it," she says while sitting with her mother at the dining room table of their Crocker-Amazon home near the San Francisco/Daly City border. It's a clear day, and the room's picture window provides a sweeping view that includes Twin Peaks and the Pacific Ocean.

"A lot of times, especially with parents who are musicians, they almost expect their kids to go into it," she adds. "I really liked anything creative. For a while, it was acting, and then for a very long time it was ballet dancing. Music was always there, but sometimes on the back burner."

Snuggling up to the trombone

Cressman remembers snuggling up to her father's trombone on the couch when she was a young child and placing her lips on the mouthpiece, as well as singing three-part harmonies with her mother and little sister. She began taking piano lessons at 5 and took up trombone in elementary school at 9.

She made her stage debut at 8, singing in the [American Conservatory Theater's](#) production of "A Christmas Carol," which she would do for two more seasons. At 11, she sang in the children's

chorus of the pre-Broadway run at the [Curran Theatre](#) of [Baz Luhrmann's](#) production of Puccini's "La Boheme." She soon tired of musical theater, however.

"At a certain point, it becomes about singing loud and singing big," she says of performing in musicals. "That wasn't my thing. The people I grew up listening to were bossa nova singers like [Elis Regina](#). And [Joni Mitchell](#) is one of my favorite artists of all time." (She does an R&B-tinged treatment of [Mitchell's](#) arrangement with lyrics of [Charles Mingus'](#) "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" on her CD.)

Passion for ballet

Ballet became [Cressman's](#) primary passion. She studied daily at the [City Ballet School](#) after her regular classes as the [Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts](#), but she turned her attention back to trombone after ripping cartilage in her left foot during a school play. She was soon subbing for her dad or trombonist [Marty Weiner](#) in [Orquesta Candela](#) and in [Pete Escovedo's](#) band, as well as playing in a number of youth jazz and Latin music bands. Her membership in the 2009 Grammy Jazz Ensembles led to a full-tuition scholarship to the [Manhattan School of Music](#).

A resident of West Harlem for the past three years while attending school in New York, [Cressman](#) is home on summer vacation. It's been a busy one. Shortly after arriving at her parents' home in early June, she got a call to go on the road for two weeks with [Van Ghost](#), an eclectic Chicago band in which she does background vocals and plays trombone. In July, she spent a week teaching jazz to youngsters at the elite [Nueva School](#) in Hillsborough, followed by two weeks of administrative work at the [Stanford Jazz Workshop](#).

Performing with Mom

She also performed with her mother's group, [Homenagem Brasileira Feminina](#), at the [Fillmore Jazz Festival](#) and at [Osteria Divino](#), an Italian restaurant in Sausalito.

[Cressman's](#) schedule in New York has been just as hectic. When not in classes at the [Manhattan School](#), where her instructors have included trombonists [Wycliffe Gordon](#) and [Luis Bonilla](#), trumpeter [Laurie Frink](#), drummer [John Riley](#) and Brazilian percussionist [Rogerio Bocalo](#), she has done three three-week tours with [Phish](#) singer-guitarist [Trey Anastasio's](#) band - she's featured on his current CD "TAB at the TAB" - and freelanced around the city with trumpeter [Nicholas Payton](#) and with former Berkeley multi-instrumentalist [Peter Apfelbaum's](#) [New York Hieroglyphics Ensemble](#). Last year at the [Apollo Theater](#), she participated in a 1930s-style variety show led by [Gordon](#) in which she sang "I'll Be Seeing You," then picked up her trombone and improvised. She recalls hearing gasps from the surprised audience.

She formed her own band, [Secret Garden](#), two years ago in New York, initially as a vehicle for her to hear her own compositions performed. The sextet, with several of its New York members plus a Bay Area rhythm section, will make its local debut Friday at the [Freight & Salvage](#) in Berkeley, followed by a set next Sunday at the [San Jose Jazz Festival](#). [Apfelbaum](#), who was best man at her parents' wedding, will be playing in her band in Berkeley, as well as headlining the show in a duet performance with drummer [Josh Jones](#).

Although "Unfolding" will not be officially released until Friday, the CD has already picked up

play on more than 140 radio stations, thanks to a Chicago promotion firm. And Cressman's Massachusetts publicist helped her land a paragraph and several photos in a story about women musicians in the online July edition of [Russian GQ Magazine](#).

Creative control

"I'm very comfortable being a sideman and stepping back and trying to play other people's music the best way I know how, but this was a chance for me to have creative control," she says of the disc. "I was really obsessed with the idea of making it a jazz album that could appeal to people who may not be jazz listeners. I just wanted to make something that shows me as me - my singing style and my writing style and my playing style as I would like it to be."



Natalie Cressman and Secret Garden: Unfolding (2012)

By **JEFF DAYTON-JOHNSON**, Published: August 15, 2012



Looking for antecedents for trombonist/vocalist Natalie Cressman? *All About Jazz's* [C. Michael Bailey](#) correctly [points us](#) to [Jack Teagarden](#), the original singing trombonist. And, in fact, Cressman finds plenty of opportunity in the funkier passages of *Unfolding*, her debut album, to deploy a fluid and full Teagarden-like sound on the instrument.

But Cressman—twenty years old and a student at the Manhattan School of Music at the time of *Unfolding's* release—also suggests a more contemporary reference: [Esperanza Spalding](#), the superstar singing bassist. As with much of Spalding's vocals on her first record—the fine *Junjo* (Ayva Musica, 2006)—Cressman's wordless and vaguely Brazilian vocals on the madrigal-like "Echo" sound like sonic accents, not the stuff of a "lead singer." That said, other examples of singing on

this record sound more like Spalding's subsequent albums, wherein she established herself as a bona fide singer.

Cressman even pays homage here to [Joni Mitchell](#), with a thoughtful and successfully rearranged version of Mitchell's vocal version of [Charles Mingus'](#) "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat." It's a great reach back, from the vantage point of 2012, through Mitchell's 1979 version, to Mingus' 1959 original (Mitchell's version can be found on her *Mingus* (Asylum, 1979); it's closely based on Mingus' from his *Mingus Ah Um* (Columbia, 1959), and follows both Mingus' composed melody as well as [John Handy's](#) tenor sax solo).

Cressman's vocal agility is furthermore on display in the difficult leaps and intervals of several compositions, her tone clear and true and unadorned.

Pianist [Fats Waller's](#) "Honeysuckle Rose," meanwhile, is given a funk makeover not unlike the music of pianist [Robert Glasper's](#) Experiment; indeed, the comparison also reveals the attractive, Glasper-like qualities in pianist [Pascal Le Boeuf's](#) playing here (Le Boeuf, 25 years old for the session, is the oldest member of Cressman's Secret Garden band).

The band is well-rehearsed and dominated, in a way, by the unsubtly forward drummer Jake Goldblas; he doesn't take much prompting to boil over, and it can be pretty exciting. Saxophonist [Peter Apfelbaum](#)—like Cressman, a traveler on the Bay Area/New York jazz corridor—guests for a fiery solo on "That Kind." Throughout, the sound is mostly acoustic, mostly mainstream with hints of Latin and rock.

Unfolding shares the strengths and weaknesses of a lot of very strong debuts: highly attentive solos, carefully crafted arrangements and spirited performances on the plus side; coupled with a certain lack of focus and melodic interest in the original compositions. Cressman will only get better, as trombonist, singer, composer and leader, and that process will be accelerated with further apprenticeship with more seasoned leaders. With the release of *Unfolding*, her phone should be ringing off the hook.

Track Listing: Flip; Whistle Song; Honeysuckle Rose; Echo; Skylight; Goodbye Pork Pie Hat; Waking; Reaching For Home; That Kind.

Personnel: Natalie Cressman: trombone, vocals; Ivan Rosenberg: trumpet; Chad Lefkowitz-Brown: tenor saxophone (1-8); Peter Apfelbaum: tenor saxophone (9); Pascal Le Boeuf: piano, Fender Rhodes, claps; Ruben Samama: acoustic bass, claps; Jake Goldblas: drums, percussion, claps; Zach Gould: claps.

Woman of Indie: Natalie Cressman – *Unfolding*

Posted on March 16, 2012 by [Kerriann Curtis](#)



Natalie Cressman is, to put it simply, an extraordinarily talented young woman. If I were to list all of her accomplishments and achievements it would take over the entire review (and we do have a word limit). Cressman is a gifted trombonist, composer, and singer and here is the kicker; she is only 20 years old! She is inspired by the music of Brazil, Cuba, India and also American jazz and folk and her music is a direct reflection of her inspirations. *Unfolding* is the creation of Cressman and Secret Garden. Picture yourself in a beautiful jazz club in the heart of New York City, press play and you are transported there.

Close your eyes, and listen. It's hard to believe the person playing in front of you with such gusto is only 20 years old. This album is a terrific showcase for her abilities, and she plays with such maturity and capability well beyond her years.

“That Kind” is the last song on the album, but it really isn't to be overlooked. Highlighting her talents in the best way, it's a strong closer, which is why it is being mentioned first. Her band that she plays with, Secret Garden are all equally

talented musicians and each get their chance to shine through out each piece on the album.

“Flip” is another great song that is easy to listen to and features a phenomenal piano solo by Pascal Le Boeuf. Like mentioned before, everyone in this band is truly special.

“Honeysuckle Rose” shows off Cressman’s vocal chops. Her voice is smooth as the honey she is singing of in this song. “Whistle Song” is also a fantastic tune that shows off Cressman’s vocals as a jazz singer. Singing up and down the scales, her voice has the capability to become as great as some of the Jazz singers we all know and love.

Once again, everyone else does get a chance to shine, and that brings the music to another level. Cressman even plays the trombone in-between singing to remind us of her supreme talent.

What is fantastic about *Unfolding* is though it’s a jazz record, the songs are so beautiful and easily comprehensible that for a moment you don’t even realize that it’s jazz you are listening to. Even those who don’t have an ear for this genre will find the music enjoyable. When listening you feel what Cressman is playing, and when there are no lyrics, the music speaks just as clearly. Keep tabs on this young talent, and support her in anyway that you can. Listen to her music, spread the word and spread the love. Musicians as talented as Cressman are a breath of fresh air and not as few and far in between as some may think. You just have to dig a little deeper to find these hidden gems.