

Hello, Grace!

Okay, you've gotten to me before I got to you: but let me tell you what a treat it was for me to see you last Wednesday night at Creole in Harlem. Now let me tell you why: When you sing, it's like, you *are* the instrument. It's hard to describe, though I've tried in telling people about your performance. You sang many songs with which I am quite familiar: jazz "standards." But you went places within the music that I'd never been, never imagined, never been shown by any other singer.

As it was happening, as you were making the music, I was aware of the effect and tried to identify right then what was going on. Best I can say, it was as though you were showing an image of, maybe, an old and beautiful garden. Where another singer might have zoomed in on the roses, you showed them in the context of the brick wall that gave this lovely spot its bounds. You showed these bricks, this wall, that gave definition to the space and then you went into the mortar between the bricks and into the moss covering them. You went deep. Your performance--you--were remarkable.

You went places within the song.... so that it was like you were *inhabiting* the song, meandering through places in it known only to you and now also to me. You were very comfortable there, perfectly sure of where you were going, so it was easy to go along with you. I found it really relaxing to be in the music. Your space was as defined as that occupied by the piano or the bass. Your voice, uniquely you, a very enjoyable guide and companion as I too began to look around at the garden within the walls.

You know, people talk about vocalists and their phrasing, and I reckon I know how to listen for and appreciate someone's "treatment" of a song. But you were doing more than phrasing or even interpreting these standards. As I say, best as words can now serve me, it was like you were within the song. Your scat singing showed this to be so and kept me interested--though I confess to often feeling bored when someone other than, say, Ella is scatting. Often it seems to me people are just hitting notes or blathering on when they scat: the vocal equivalent of scronking on a sax...it's not much more than math, an intellectual exercise. You, by contrast, intrigued me and pleased me with your scatting. I wanted to hear everything you had to say.

Your delivery of lyrics was, to my ears, even better--because you reached more than my ears. I love and admire how you imbue words with emotion, with sense impressions, with beautiful tones and clarity and huskiness that reveal the depth of a woman who has lived and loved and lost and gone on and come back and is living fully right now. So rich, so real. Sassy, sexy, plaintive, warm, sad, charming, wondering, celebrating....

Yes, you are very talented, Grace. Singing with your own voice, with perspective that's uniquely your own. Thanks for sharing, for showing us what you did last Wednesday. You provide a living example of the power of "going for it," the power of allowing yourself to feel the music, make the music, *be* the music. It takes chops, which you've got, but it also takes a willingness to be known, a willingness to be seen and heard as yourself. Thanks for setting that example, which has bearing beyond jazz, for life in general. You're inspiring.

Can you tell I'm glad to have come out to see you? The night was nourishing for me. I'm expecting to come back this Wednesday. Looking forward to sitting again with your gracious friends Bill and Edie--both of whom value and appreciate you and your music. Same goes for me, too.

Congratulations on developing your talent and using it!

Deborah