

n Sous le



TALES  
& Tongues

- 1 Alfa Va La Luna 6:14 (Public Domain)
- 2 Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn 5:38 (Sholem Secunda, Jacob Jacobs)
- 3 Sous Le Ciel De Paris 5:12 (Jean Drejac, Hubert Giraud)
- 4 Ikh Hob Dikh Tsufil Lib (Verse) 1:34 (Alex Olshanetsky, Chaim Towber)
- 5 Ikh Hob Dikh Tsufil Lib 4:05 (see above)
- 6 Triste 4:13 (Antonio Carlos Jobim)
- 7 Estate 8:28 (Bruno Martino, Bruno Bighetti)
- 8 El Día Que Me Quieras 6:43 (Carlos Gardel, Alfredo Lepera)
- 9 Chega de Saudade 6:10 (Antonio Carlos Jobim, Vinicius de Moraes)
- 10 Que Reste-t-il De Nos Amours 5:41 (Charles Trenet, Chauliac)
- 11 Delilah 7:18 (Victor Young)



TALES & TONGUES • KATCHIE & LE MONDE CACHÉ • HCW 111

TALES  
& Tongues

KATCHIE &  
LE MONDE CACHÉ

Singing apart, making music of distinction and lasting value, isn't easy in a world. So as my colleague Francis Davis argued in a 2006 essay for *The New Yorker*: "We respect more from singers ... because words speak to us in a way that a microphone can — and because their instrument is also ours."

For Marie Cartwright, standing apart isn't a problem. A longtime New Yorker with a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology, she relocated to San Antonio, Texas in 2006 and has a tenured appointment at Northwest Vista College. Her previous efforts include treatments of works by John Cage and poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Now, with *Tales and Tongues*, she shifts her attention to what she terms the "global songbook."

If we're convinced by Davis's take on the immediacy of words, just think of the possibilities and poetic richness of a collection sung in Ladino, Yiddish, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and French. Leading her group *Le Monde Caché* ("the hidden world"), Cartwright brings out the order and melodic refinement in this material, singing with great poise and also playing flute, her first instrument, which to her constitutes a language in itself.

"My specialization is cross-cultural theories and practices of improvisation," Cartwright explains, drawing a line from her academic to her artistic work. "When I got to San Antonio I also started a radio show, 'Planet Jazz,' on the Trinity University station, and a lot of that was the global songbook — playing music that has gone into the jazz 'stream,' things that have gone back and forth from African diaspora cultures and can be considered a part of jazz, in one way or another."

From all these various corners come the songs of *Tales and Tongues*. Cartwright enlisted a group of musicians who would do them justice, beginning with her husband and frequent collaborator, alto saxophonist Richard

Oppenheim. "A friend calls him the *Trombrower*," says Cartwright. "He's a great musician, with a lot of depth and breadth and great ears. We talk a lot about what it is that we're going for: the sound, the timbres, the arrangements and so on."

Cartwright met pianist and fellow ethnomusicologist Mark Lomanno "while we were founding the Southern Plains chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology. I was really fortunate to have him to work with." Of Billy Satterwhite, the bassist, Cartwright says: "He's one of the younger generation, working on a Westex in Ann Arbor, Michigan with some colleagues of mine. 'Billy the Kid' we call him, very eager and wonderful." Drummer Kevin Hess, she adds, "is from a piano-tuning and musician dynasty here in San Antonio." Together, they all "get" Cartwright's intention on *Tales and Tongues*, coming to grips with music from vastly different traditions and vocabularies and giving it life in a new context.

While readying these songs for performance, Cartwright wrestles with subtleties of pronunciation and phrasing, of meaning and syntax. In the end she connects not just to the poignant texts, but also to the doleful minor-key melodies that make up this set. That subtle Old World tonality, Cartwright notes, can be found in certain corners of American pop — she cites Irving Berlin's "Blue Skies" or Cole Porter's "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" as examples.

From the Benny Goodman-associated classic "Boy Wer Bistu Sheyn" (sung in the original Yiddish) to Victor Young's "Delilah" (a flute feature that closes out the album), Cartwright hits on that undefined yet universal feeling that goes by different names, from blues to soul. She quotes the old club joke: "D minor — to you it's a key, to me it's living." The themes can be outright sad: young women scorned, for instance, in the Ladino "Alta Va La Luna" ("high goes the moon") and the Yiddish tango "Nix Hab Dikh Tsufli Li" ("I have too

much love for you"). Yet redemptive hope can always peek through the clouds. "The two parts of 'Nix Hab' are really different," Cartwright observes. "The verse tells the story of being left at the altar, and then in the tango part, she's happy despite it all in her dreams, saying, 'I can't hate you, the love I have for you gives me pleasure rather than pain.' I think that's great."

Yes, there are Jewish tangos, and hand it to Cartwright for digging them up. She also highlights the tango tradition with "El Día Que Me Quieras" by Carlos Gardel, the Argentine legend lost in a plane crash in 1935. "For my doctorate I did research on how the new tango came out of the old, so I've been interested in Gardel for 10 or 15 years," Cartwright says. "This is a standard that jazz musicians in Argentina would do. It's a tremendously romantic song — a curious little glowworm nests in her lover's hair.... Here in San Antonio we're a majority Latino city, so the audience loves it."

Of course, no South American jazz journey would be complete without Brazil. Cartwright includes the Jobim staples "Triste" and "Chega de Saudade" and pointedly steers clear of the English lyrics that are often used. "The lyrics by Jobim and Vinícius de Moraes capture something much more," she argues. "That's a beef I have — in English they're fourth-rate lyrics, but they're first-rate in Portuguese. So why not sing them that way?" Another famous bossa, "Estate," comes to us from Italy: "Think Nino Rota," Cartwright says of the general vibe. "Italian bossas are more surreal, they're once more removed."

French is Cartwright's strongest language besides English — she lived in Lebanon for a year as a teen — and so "Sous le Ciel de Paris" and "Que Reste-t-il De Nos Amours" have a natural, homey quality. "Kevin and Rich tore it up," Cartwright enthuses, referring to the sax-drum breakdown (her idea) of the former. Who knows if this bright waltz was an Kenny Dornan's mind when he wrote "Blue Bossa," but the passing melodic resemblance is there.

Like the Brazilian tunes, the Charles Trenet number, better known to Americans as "I Wish You Love," has a far greater impact in its original language. "In French," Cartwright notes, "it's about what happened to our youth, what happened to those stolen kisses and mystic little villages, and your hair blowing in the wind, what happened? It's all part of our past now. That's totally different than 'I Wish You Love,' which is soppy by comparison."

Ultimately, *Tales and Tongues* is about musical openness, about jazz's particular way of drawing in the world and still remaining unmistakably itself. Jazz history is rife with artists who've embodied that ideal in their work, and this musician/scholar, from her haven down in Texas, is doing that history proud. As the saying (sort of) goes, you can take Cartwright out of New York, but you can't take New York and its restless global mindset out of Cartwright.



David R. Adler  
January 2011