

Echoes Of Trane In Sax Sets

Marciano Wrote Most Songs But Was Faithful To The Master

By **CHUCK OBUCHOWSKI**
SPECIAL TO THE COURANT

Italian saxophonist Carla Marciano channeled the raging musical spirit of John Coltrane with astounding accuracy during her

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first U.S. appearance Friday at New Haven's Firehouse 12.

Although Marciano wrote all but two of the compositions her quartet performed on Friday, Coltrane's influence was pervasive. From the emphasis on modal song structures to the intense, searching quality of their solos, each member of Marciano's quartet revealed a significant debt to one of the most revered jazz musicians in history.

Not to suggest that Marciano's group engaged in sentimental nostalgia. Their improvisations were every bit as brazen and unique as those created by the members of Coltrane's classic 1960s quartet. "Dance of Mind" provided the most poignant example of this spontaneous creativity when Marciano — on alto

sax — broke into an incendiary duet with drummer Gaetano Fasano midway through the piece. The two sparred furiously for several minutes before bassist Aldo Vigorito and pianist Alessandro La Corte rejoined them.

"Trane's Groove," the title track from Marciano's 2002 debut CD, set the mood for the evening's two sets. As soon as the 33-year-old Salerno resident began playing, the air in the room became charged by the volcanic force of her music. (Her musical hero is said to have had much the same immediate impact on his audiences.) Surprisingly, she produced these mighty sounds on the diminutive soprano saxophone, an instrument rarely used in jazz. Elsewhere, she favored the alto, as opposed to the tenor and soprano saxophones preferred by Coltrane.

Most of the concert's material was culled from "A Strange Day," issued last year on Milan's highly regarded Black Saint label. The quartet's only interpretation of a standard at Firehouse 12 — Irving Berlin's "Russian Lullaby" — first appeared on that 2005 album. Marciano's high-velocity arrangement of the tune demon-

strated that she and her band mates are very comfortable playing on bebop changes.

Their sensitive work on ballads, such as "Far Away," exposed yet another dimension of the group's capabilities, and provided their leader with more opportunities to distinguish herself stylistically from her mentor.

This quartet has used hundreds of live performances throughout Italy to develop its impressive chemistry. Each member balanced excellent ensemble and individual contributions during Friday's program. Fasano's muscular polyrhythms showed his allegiance to the groundbreaking work of Elvin Jones. However, he took the opportunity during one of his solos to honor Max Roach, as he combined that master's "The Drum Also Waltzes" with his own percussive statements.

The Carla Marciano Quartet concludes its inaugural U.S. visit next Saturday with a featured performance at the fifth annual Hartford International Jazz Festival, at the Mezzanine, 960 Main St., at 8 p.m. For festival details, call 860-524-9094, or visit www.HIJF.com.