



TAWANDA

Smile



TAWANDA

- ✓ Smile / I'm All Smiles¹
- ✓ Out of this World²
- ✓ Bridges¹
- ✓ Sister Moon²
- ✓ What a Little Moonlight Can Do¹
- ✓ I'm Okay²
- ✓ A Child is Born¹
- ✓ Lucky to be Me²
- ✓ Sack Full of Dreams¹
- ✓ Bring Back My Dreamer²
- ✓ You and the Night and the Music¹
- ✓ Smile (a capella)¹

Pianist & Arrangers: Josh Nelson¹, Tamir Hendelman²

Bass: Kevin Axt Drums: Gene Coye¹, Ray Brinker²

Guitar: Anthony Wilson Saxophones: Gary Meek

Special thanks to: Mirabai Daniels

© & © 2022 Resonance Records. 5711 West Adams Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90016-2401. All rights reserved. Unauthorized reproduction is a violation of applicable laws. Made in USA. Resonance Records is a division of the Rising Jazz Stars Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit California corporation.



ResonanceRecords.org

A WORD FROM PRODUCER

George Klabin

The purpose of this recording release is more than just introducing a uniquely talented young jazz vocalist. The title *Smile* could also be called “UPLIFT”, because in this very polarized world with so much fear, anger, disillusion, and unhappiness, these songs tell about the other side – the positive, the hopes, dreams, the joy, and the mystery of life. It is my hope and belief that you will be inspired to remember that we all have a choice in any circumstance, and choosing love over fear is always the best choice.

Sensitively yet powerfully delivering that message in her debut recording release is Tawanda, a wonderful young vocalist I have had the honor of working with. My nickname for her is “TAWANDA-FUL”! She is the future of modern jazz, a soulful, beautiful voice, interpreting the type of music that made jazz popular: melody, lyricism, and an innate sense of swing.

To learn more about her, please visit her website: TawandaMusic.com and check out videos of her performing live on YouTube and ResonanceRecords.org.

– *George Klabin*

April, 2022

Produced by *George Klabin* • Recording and Mixing Engineers: *George Klabin* and Fran Gala • Mastered by Fran Gala

Album Design: JRocket77 Design • Photos: Jeff Xander

Management: MWO Organization • mobile US: +1 818-720-0861 • mobile UK: +44 7484 894920 • mwomanagement.com

TAWANDA

Smile



THE 9th Annual Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition, held in Newark, New Jersey on June 6, 2021, uncovered a 25-year-old singer of such grace, musicality, and emotional directness that it was hard to imagine how she had learned so much, so soon. Tawanda Suessbrich-Joaquim, now known simply as Tawanda, could have rested on the natural beauty of her alto voice, with its trombone-like low notes, a middle register as clear and polished as glass, and a distinctively sweet-and-sour tone. But in the course of three songs—“All or Nothing at All,” “Guess I’ll Hang My Tears Out to Dry,” and “Ain’t Nobody’s Business”— she revealed a deeper aim: to share stories with the utmost clarity and the least amount of clutter. She was rhythmically spot-on, with impeccable diction, but underneath it all lay a wisdom unusual in one so young.

Tawanda tied for first place with singer Gabrielle Cavassa. Now comes her first album, produced by George Klabin for Resonance Records, his celebrated jazz label. It was George who had entered her in the contest and nurtured her to such a high degree. “I really needed that guidance to get to where I am now,” she says. The silky, translucent accompaniment was arranged by two members of the Resonance family, Tamir Hendelman and Josh Nelson, both of them sensitive and versatile pianists who have brought out the best in many a singer.

All this constitutes a Cinderella debut for Tawanda, who had done her first full show only a year before the Vaughan competition—and who had not discovered jazz until she was eighteen. Born in Las Cruces, New Mexico, she grew up hearing an exotic blend of international music



played by her mother, who was born in Germany, and her father, who comes from Mozambique. Singing attracted her from an early age, and in high school Tawanda pursued it with a vengeance, appearing in student musicals and joining various choirs.

Her epiphany came at Santa Fe University of Art and Design, when she began working with Mirabai Daniels, a jazz singer and teacher whose husband is clarinetist Eddie Daniels. As she delved into jazz, Tawanda felt freed. “For me, coming from a choral background, jazz was much more of a wavy line that’s all over the place versus a straight line where you are singing the exact dynamics that are written on the page, you’re holding the notes properly, you’re trying to blend in with other people. In jazz you’re getting out of your comfort zone, emitting all these different tones and sounds and frequencies.”

Mirabai knew George through her husband, another Resonance artist, and she enthused to him about this promising young singer. In 2019, after graduation, Tawanda moved to Southern California and met George, who began to mentor Tawanda and record demos with her. “Considering that she had only listened to jazz since age eighteen,” he says, “I was impressed with her natural ability to interpret the jazz vocal idiom with any song she chose.”

But adversities piled up for her—a painful breakup, then the loss of her day job due to the pandemic, followed by a reluctant move back home. The death of George Floyd compounded her growing depression: “I felt really hopeless, like nothing we were doing was effecting any positive social change.”

Smile

TAYYAWANDA



In 2020 she moved back to California, settling in Los Angeles. George continued to nurture her, and he booked her at Campus JAX, a supper club in Newport Beach, for her debut show. Shortly after that he submitted her for the Vaughan competition. Her performance in it left no doubt that she was ready to make an album.

Tawanda took on a broad, demanding repertoire, much of it suggested by George. Through it runs a strain of steadfast optimism. After her hard times, she says, “these songs were like medicine. To go into the studio and sing about joy and dreams and love was a big challenge but at the same time it inspired me to keep my head up. You can manifest through singing.”

The opening medley Smile, tells of the need to soldier forth with hope in one’s heart. When the background turns to trio jazz and the song to “I’m All Smiles,” Tawanda floats over the chart’s rhythmic breaks as blithely as if she were taking a stroll in the park.

Several upbeat standards, including “What a Little Moonlight Can Do” and “Out of This World,” are freshened up in adventurous yet respectful ways. Singing Sting’s “Sister Moon,” she elucidates a fairy tale about a spirit torn between his avowed love, the sun, and the moon, a temptress who obsesses him. She brings a resolute calm to “I’m Okay,” written by the Argentine composer-pianist Eddie del Barrio and recorded by Dianne Reeves, one of Tawanda’s key influences: “She’s graceful-strong. I’m aspiring to that.” The song, says Tawanda, “is about overcoming, and recognizing all the hardships you’ve gone through to get to the place you are now. It’s a solid, grounded song with a sense of strength and pride.”



“A Child Is Born,” is a collaboration between trumpeter Thad Jones and lyricist Alec Wilder. It speaks of the loveliest of new beginnings, and Tawanda sings it with tenderness and wonder.

Tawanda effortlessly nails the tricky intervals and key changes in “Lucky to Be Me,” arranged by Hendelman in a version that overflows with jubilation. “Sack Full of Dreams” is a dignified call for unity and peace in a world of lost souls. It was composed in the late ‘60s by the outstanding but drug-addicted arranger, Gary McFarland, who died at 38; the words are by Louis Savary, a prolific author on spirituality. The piece was introduced by jazz drummer and singer Grady Tate and later recorded by Donny Hathaway. “It’s one of the songs I feel the world really needs,” says Tawanda. “How do we create a new vision of love and togetherness when people are so disconnected? How do we love bigger than this isolation we’re experiencing?”

“Bring Back My Dreamer” comes from Jeff Harris, the pianist, symphony conductor, and composer who for years accompanied Maureen McGovern; her 1998 recording was the touchstone for this track. The song’s yearning and desperation touched Tawanda, who couldn’t help but recall “the parts of myself that were lost over the last few years.”

Her skill at choral singing shines through in the closing “Smile,” an a cappella overdubbed solo quartet of Tawandas, arranged by Nelson.

A portrait of a young Black woman with a large, voluminous afro hairstyle. She is smiling broadly, showing her teeth. She is wearing a black sleeveless top and large hoop earrings. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The image is framed by dark brown vertical bars on the left and right sides.

TAWANDA

Smile



Her listeners, especially the young ones, feel the same sense of discovery when she sings. "I'm always happily surprised when friends come to my shows and say, wow, I didn't even know about jazz, and this was beautiful."

Tawanda is determined, she says, to keep developing, and to "sing these different styles of music and honor the song while putting my own spin on things. I've been practicing a lot and trying to get more comfortable with jazz theory and expression. I want to be right there with my voice and storytelling." She's well on her way.

— *James Gavin* *New York City, 2022*

James Gavin's books include biographies of Chet Baker, Lena Horne, Peggy Lee, and George Michael.



ResonanceRecords.org

Produced by *George Klabin*

Recording and Mixing Engineers: *George Klabin* and Fran Gala • Mastered by Fran Gala

Album design: JRocket77 Design • Photos: Jeff Xander

Management: MWO Organization • mobile US: +1 818-720-0861

mobile UK: +44 7484 894920 • mwomanagement.com

© & © 2022 Resonance Records. 5711 West Adams Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90016-2401. All rights reserved.

Unauthorized reproduction is a violation of applicable laws. Made in USA.

Resonance Records is a division of the Rising Jazz Stars Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit California corporation.