



Portrait of A Female Jazz Artist: Lori Dow

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Boston-based vocalist Lori Dow won an Urban Music Award for Best Female Jazz artist on Saturday, April 15, 2006. Held at the Berklee Performance Center, New England's First Annual Urban Music Awards showcased the local and regional artists, performers, producers and promoters that enliven the area's urban music scene. While the recognition of such outstanding talents is long overdue, the careers of many of the award recipients would not have been possible without the wait. In fact, Lori, who has been working for the past three years as the Associate Director of Admission at Milton Academy, says that winning the award could not have happened at a better time.

Six years ago, Lori found herself at a turning point in her life. Music had always been something that she did quite well, but now she was at a crossroad where she wanted to take it to the next level. How does one do this successfully while continuing to work in the field that she is equally as passionate about? With that said, Lori took a leap of faith and began to focus in on her lifelong passion for singing and with tenacity she made her rounds, singing at churches, weddings, special events, including performing "The National Anthem" before an audience of over 14,000 people at a McDonalds's All

American Game that was held at the former Fleet Center in 2000 and at the 2004 Democratic National Convention delegate receptions.

Though not quite a brand name, clearly Lori is well on her way to becoming common knowledge. Instinctively speaking, her voice fulfills that need to hear real, uplifting vocals that inspire and transform. With a four octave vocal range, Lori mixes elements of jazz, gospel, and R&B. Like a spiritual source, her music is dynamic for all its elements. Her latest CD, "Unconditionally Yours," inspires, provokes, and most fundamentally, it is qualitatively good. Still exultantly proud of her big win at the Urban Music Awards, Lori took some time out of her busy schedule to share some of her glitter with the Boston Banner.

Who are your musical influences?

Although I could name quite a few, Yolanda Adams is huge for me. Once I heard her first CD, I was hooked and I have bought everything that she put out since. When "Open My Heart," came out, I was going through a tough time and it was just the song that I needed to get through. I said, "If I ever do a CD, that song will be on it."

And what about your personal influences?

It has to be my Mom, Holly Dow, my Aunt Crystal and my Grandmother (the late June Powell Dow). All three ladies raised me from a child and they sacrificed a lot so that I could have a wonderful life.

When did your singing career begin?

My singing career began in church in a children's choir. I would sing everything I could, not realizing what was happening. I was nine or ten when I did my first solo at school. I fondly remember my grandmother buying me an eight track that had a little black adjustable strap and a microphone that allowed my voice to amplify through it. I would sing everything I could sing into it. The Motown era was huge in my family. I heard Diana Ross and the Supremes so much at home that I wondered if Motown had other artists. I also remember going to concerts at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem to see Nancy Wilson and so many others. Music, from the time I was an infant, was just filtering through my body.

When did you start taking your singing career seriously?

I started taking singing seriously in 2000, although my first breakout concert was a talent show that Eliot Church of Roxbury had at Roxbury Community College's Media Center in 1997. At the time, I didn't have a band, but I agreed to do the show. Somehow I connected with Ed Jones, who played the piano, was a writer and composer, and who also had his own band. I got up on stage and performed two songs at the talent show and then, slowly but surely, I was introduced to other musicians through the Boston music circuit and things began to change. I started gigging at Slade's Bar and Grill with the Ray

Brown Quartet and performing in several different venues with other local bands. In addition, Ed had me singing on his original music, (one that I would later record – All the Man that I Need) and before I knew it I met Ray Archie who joined Ed's band as the new bass player. Ray and I started collaborating on my first CD, which was called "Exquisite." It was truly a labor of love; unfortunately the CD was never released. However, once I began working on my latest CD "Unconditionally Yours", three of the songs from "Exquisite," including the title track, appears on the new one.

How do you balance having a professional career with being a singer?

Education has also been my passion, but it was hard to balance both career and singing when I was working in higher education, because the demands were so great. Now, although, the work is quite busy at Milton Academy, I am able to balance both. Milton Academy has allowed me fit the pieces of the puzzle together and to really move. I have had a blessed career, but I needed to back away from one area in order to pursue other things. In doing that it has taken me to heights I couldn't even imagine. I feel like I've covered the local Boston circuit, but now I need to get to the national level.

How did it feel to perform at the Urban Music Award and ultimately win?

Susan Flint, the VP of the Urban Music Awards, asked me to perform at the show. It was amazing. We had twelve people on stage. We hired a wonderful band that included Zeke Martin on the drums, Tony Castillo on keys, we had three horn players, Joe Albano on tenor and Anthony Morris on alto sax, and Igmarr Thomas, on trumpet. I had three powerful background vocalists, Nina Evans, Dee Lavender and Nichelle Mungo and saxophone great, Antonio Jackson, made a guest appearance. The sound was great and this was due to the wonderful musical arrangement done by my musical director and bassist – Daniel Day. I was up for three categories, which included Best Female Jazz, Best Traditional Gospel and Best Contemporary Gospel. I didn't have time to think about winning because I was so busy trying to put on a good show. When I was done with my performance, they were about to announce the winners for the Best Female Jazz Category, and I thought, "Well let me stay up here and see what happens." When they announced my name I was surprised. It was a surreal moment. I went on stage to accept the award and that was awesome.

Do you have a manager?

Right now I do the management, but my Musical Director also helps out with my show setup. I have lots of folks in my corner but I manage everything at this point. I also have a good friend who has taken stock in the Lori Dow project. He calls himself the "self-appointed president of the Lori Dow fan club." He buys my CDs and gives them out to people and mails them all over the country. He even sent one to Oprah.

What about Lori Dow Music?

That's my production company and I'm starting to build and grow that. Eventually, I would love to have other artists working with me. Right now it's still new. The whole production came out last year in April and I'm still working through all of that. It allows me to own the rights to everything that I do.

A lot of the people that know of you probably don't know that you also have a music ministry at Eliot Church of Roxbury. Can you talk about that?

I do it because I love it, and I love the fact that I touch people with my voice, and it is that part that is the most amazing to me. People come to me after I sing my solos at church and say, "That song really moved me. It was like you knew exactly what I was feeling."

Do you plan to release a gospel CD?

The reason why I chose "Open My Heart" as the last track on "Unconditionally Yours" is because the story isn't finished. It will continue on the next CD, which will be more gospel/R&B, and then back to jazz. I say this because the whole production of "Unconditionally Yours" has been a spiritual journey. It was recorded by Felix Mwangi, at his studio -- Twelfth Note Productions, which is located around the corner from Twelfth Baptist Church. I thought that was really interesting. My photographer was a gentleman named Moses Kamau. All of the musicians I work with, including the writer of three of my songs, 347 Music Group artist Terry Gresham, are all spiritually grounded. Everything else just fell right into place with the making of the CD, to finding the right musicians to making the music. So yes, a gospel CD is a part of this story.

To find out more about upcoming Lori Dow performances, please visit her website at www.loridow.com.