

NATALIE CRESSMAN

SINGER – SONGWRITER – TROMBONIST

Possessing a voice as cool and crystalline as an Alpine stream, **Natalie Cressman** is a rising singer/songwriter and trombonist who draws inspiration from a vast array of deep and powerful musical currents. She is releasing her 5th album in April 2019, this time in collaboration with Brazilian composer, guitarist and vocalist **Ian Faquini**. Drawing from impressionism, jazz, and the great Brazilian songwriting tradition, ***Setting Rays of Summer*** is a ten-track collection of original material featuring compositions in three different languages: Portuguese, English and French. With the warm instrumentation of acoustic guitar and trombone alongside two-part vocal harmonies hugging the Brazilian-accented Portuguese, Cressman & Faquini weave their musical voices together to create a fully orchestrated sound befitting a much larger ensemble. Exposing listeners to new stories and new styles of Brazilian music, ***Setting Rays of Summer*** is delivered with endearing simplicity which displays a fresh, individualistic sonic vision.

Steadily evolving in many directions, the 27-year-old Cressman has already put down deep roots in several overlapping scenes. A prodigiously talented New York City-based trombonist, she's spent the past nine years touring the jam band circuit as a horn player and vocalist with **Phish's Trey Anastasio**. Deeply versed in Latin jazz, post-bop, pop, and Brazilian music, she tapped the interlaced traditions on her first two solo albums, 2012's ***Unfolding*** and 2014's ***Turn the Sea***.

She released ***The Traces EP*** in 2017, revealing her latest evolution, as she expands her creative reach into post-production with meticulously crafted soundscaped tracks inspired by R&B singer/songwriter **Emily King**, the **Prince**-championed vocal trio **KING**, and particularly Australian avant-soul quartet **Hiatus Kaiyote**. ***The Traces EP*** follows on the heels of 2016's ***Etchings in Amber***, a gorgeous duo album with guitarist **Mike Bono** that introduced Cressman as a formidable musical force without her horn. While the project focuses on songs featuring lyrics she wrote for several Bono compositions, Cressman also wrote words and music for three of her songs, contributing to the atmospheric suite of jazz-inflected, genre-bending tunes.

When she's not performing her own music, Cressman can be found collaborating with some of the most illustrious figures in rock, funk, jazz and beyond, which have included **Carlos Santana**, **Aaron Neville**, **Dave Matthews**, **Phish**, **Big Gigantic**, **Escort**, **Wycliffe Gordon**, **Nicholas Payton**, **Anat Cohen**, **The Motet**, and **Umphrey's McGee**. Her passion for groove music hasn't diluted her love of jazz. In 2016 SFJAZZ commissioned her to develop music for a concert celebrating the legacy of jazz trombonist/arranger **Melba Liston**. She also continues her long-standing musical relationship with world jazz innovator **Peter Apfelbaum**, performing with his band **Sparkler**. A fellow Bay Area native, Apfelbaum has hired Cressman since she was a young teen, a relationship that exemplifies the creative hothouse in which she was raised.

Her mother, **Sandy Cressman**, is a jazz vocalist who immersed herself deeply into the traditions of Brazilian music, collaborating with many of Brazil's most respected musicians. Her father, **Jeff Cressman**, is a recording engineer and trombonist who recently concluded a two-decade run with **Santana**. Natalie quite naturally began studying trombone with her father, but set out to be a dancer rather than a musician. An aspiring ballet dancer until her junior year of high school, she changed courses when an injury sidelined her dance aspirations.

Her parents provided entrée to a number of enviable opportunities, but Cressman's own prodigious gifts continued to merit her presence in any number of high-profile settings. She soon found herself playing salsa with Uruguayan percussionist **Edgardo Cambon e Orquesta Candela**, Latin jazz with **Pete Escovedo's Latin Jazz Orchestra**, world music with **Jai Uttal and the Pagan Love Orchestra**, and globally-inspired avant-garde jazz with multi-instrumentalist **Peter Apfelbaum**, a close family friend.

Cressman traveled east in 2009 to study at the **Manhattan School of Music**, and the following year jam band pioneer **Trey Anastasio** recruited her for his touring band. He met Cressman at 18, and "was instantly floored by how melodically and naturally she played and sang," Anastasio says. "Natalie is the rarest of musicians. Born into a musical family and raised in a home filled with the sounds of Brazilian music, jazz and Afro-Cuban rhythms, musicality is in her DNA."

Her far flung musical passions continue to bear new fruit, as her identity as a horn player and a singer/songwriter evolve in different directions. Playing funk trombone in arenas and cavernous theaters has required developing an aggressive new vocabulary of shouts, growls, smears and yelps, a la the JB Horns' Fred Wesley. Her vocal work in increasingly intimate and rhythmically insinuating settings has revealed an artist who can thrive in any setting, from raucous, reverberant halls to packed and pulsing lofts and nightclubs. In an epoch marked by infinite musical possibilities, Natalie Cressman is a singular force who draws from an improbable breadth of sonic realms. Cressman is an artist endorser for **King Trombones**.

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Photo: Lauren Desberg

NATALIE CRESSMAN

WORDS FROM THE PRESS

"Her veteran skills as a trombonist are clear, but what's even more impressive is her vocal performance and talents as a lyricist...If you haven't heard of Natalie Cressman, you definitely will soon."

— Molly Fosco, *Huffington Post*

"This is a collection of angular compositions that are as intricate as they are accessible...The mix of Cressman's confident voice, tart trombone and crack songwriting establishes the artist well down the road from an already fully-established sound on *Unfolding*...Natalie Cressman continues to arrive and is sure to continue her brilliant evolution as a musician."

— C. Michael Bailey, *All about Jazz*

"Cressman's second release presents yet another pop sensibility infused with jazz, this time with loads of instrumentation, all of it clearly interwoven into the singer's girl-next-door charm. The arrangements flavor everything, with subtle surprises, fresh writing and tuneful material (mostly hers). The San Francisco native's easy, listenable lyrics are the connective tissue. Cressman also plays some serious trombone, and she has an affinity for involving others in this septet of horns, guitar and acoustic and electric keys."

★★★★ - *Downbeat Magazine*

VENUES INCLUDE

- Carnegie Hall (New York, NY)
- Apollo Theater (New York, NY)
- Red Rocks Amphitheater (Morrison, CO)
- San Jose Jazz Festival (San Jose, CA)
- The Fillmore (San Francisco, CA)
- The Fox Theater (Oakland, CA)
- Brooklyn Bowl (Brooklyn and Las Vegas)
- Beacon Theater (New York, NY)
- The Jazz Gallery (New York, NY)
- Joe's Pub (New York, NY)
- Freight & Salvage (Berkeley, CA)
- Yoshi's (San Francisco & Oakland, CA)
- Terminal 5 (New York, NY)
- New Orleans Jazz Festival (New Orleans, LA)
- High Sierra Music Festival (Quincy, CA)

"A voice that can conquer pop, jazz, the jam world or whatever she decides to pursue next."

— Shawn Donohue, *Glide Magazine*

"Her trombone is world-class, but her singing voice is another thing entirely, an empathic entity that channels the ages. Cressman's is a flawless act that can only get better with time and age. Yep, I smell a Grammy — someday."

— Dave Good, *San Diego Reader*

"Musical barriers are deftly shattered as a more organic indie rock sound is somehow merged with a deceptively subtle modern jazz interpretation...The band is first rate. The tunes are wildly inventive with perhaps another talent creeping into Cressman's arsenal as her production skills seem to capture the genre bending sound that permeates *Turn The Sea*. *Unfolding* was incredibly good. *Turn The Sea* is better!"

- Brent Black, *Critical Jazz*

RECORDINGS INCLUDE

- "Setting Rays Of Summer" Natalie Cressman & Ian Faquini (2019)
- "The Traces EP" Natalie Cressman (2017)
- "Big Boat" Phish, JEMP Records (2016)
- "Etchings in Amber" Natalie Cressman & Mike Bono (2016)
- "Brighter Future" Big Gigantic (2016)
Featured vocalist on "No Apologies"
- "Paper Wheels" Trey Anastasio, ATO Records (2015)
- "Turn the Sea" Natalie Cressman (2014)
- "Traveler" Trey Anastasio, ATO Records (2012)
- "Unfolding" Natalie Cressman & Secret Garden Cressman Music (2012)
- "TAB at the TAB" Trey Anastasio Band, Rubber Jungle Records (2010)
- "New Constellations: Live in Vienna" Josh Roseman Unit, Accurate Records (2007)
- "It is Written" Peter Apfelbaum, ACT (2005)

DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond Since 1934



Alison Lewis

DEBUT ALBUM - SEVEN

"...she instinctively connects emotionally to the lyrics, making the listener contemplate each word, seeing songs like Irving Berlin's 'Cheek to Cheek' and Bob Dylan's 'Like a Rolling Stone' in a new light, a way that makes the songs seem even more brilliant than their original version."
—Susan Frances of ANS

"Lewis's soulful and soaring vocal range joined with beautifully sculpted arrangements makes for an outstanding production."
—Glenn Daniels, TheJazzPage

"Seven is a tour de force... taken to task by a highly qualified and potent vocalist. One I hope to hear for years to come. Well done, and HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!"
—Constance Tucker, All About Vocals

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Natalie Cressman and Mike Bono's new album is titled *Etchings In Amber*.

NATALIE CRESSMAN & MIKE BONO

Exploring New Territory

At a recent performance at Joe's Pub in New York, vocalist Natalie Cressman and acoustic guitarist Mike Bono wove unusual threads into rare shapes and sounds, their dense compositions alluding to jazz, folk and left-of-center pop. On the duo's debut album, *Etchings In Amber* (Cressman Music), crystalline vocals soar over dense acoustic guitar like a cool fall day holding onto the last rays of the setting sun.

"There's a lot of artists coming from the jazz world who are expanding its reach by bringing in [other] styles," said Cressman, 25. "It's always been an evolving art form. What I feel most comfortable doing is bringing in modern influences from my jazz background. Our music could appeal to a jazz listener who likes Joni Mitchell's *Court And Spark* period, or people our age who only listen to contemporary singer-songwriters or pop music."

Cressman—whose skilled trombone work was featured on her albums *Turn The Sea* and *Unfolding*—grew up in the San Francisco area performing in her parents' band, led by her trombone-playing father, Jeff Cressman, a longtime member of Carlos Santana's group. Aside from her duo with Bono, she also leads her own group (including Bono) and is a member of guitarist Trey Anastasio's touring band. Bono, also 25, is part of the new wave of New York players who count Ben Monder and Julian Lage as influences. *From Where You Are* was his leader debut.

Bono's angular compositions frequently challenge Cressman's vocal skills. "The pieces Mike and I collaborate on often begin as solo guitar pieces," Cressman explained. "So I'm limited by the shape of the melodies, which are very jumpy. Finding the right vowels or [crafting lyrics that] still sound like English—it can be a challenge. The limitation provides a form of innovat-

ing to find fresh words and phrases. We haven't tried setting [previously composed] words to music because I like hearing the song and feeling what I think it's about and blending the meaning and the sound of the words into the music as seamlessly as possible."

"When we started playing together and I began writing music for the duo, I wasn't necessarily writing jazz songs," Bono said. "I just follow the melodies I'm hearing. Some of them are more unusual and obscure; others are more folk-sounding. I believe Natalie follows a similar arc. Our crossover is harmonizing those melodies in a nontraditional way. The harmonies from both of our styles stem from jazz."

Cressman and Bono play a regular circuit of small clubs in and around New York, where they stretch their repertoire to include tunes from numerous genres, including Monder's "Charlotte's Song," Tove Lo's "Habits (Stay High)," Bon Iver's "Blindsided" and Norwegian vocalist Hanne Hukkelberg's "Do Not As I Do."

"I think of João Gilberto, or other artists who wrote great music on acoustic guitar with ethereal, floaty melodies," Cressman said. "Flora Purim was a big influence on me as well. That's still under the wider umbrella of jazz in my mind. Where I was raised, in the Bay Area, Brazilian and straight-ahead jazz are played as one. The musicians cross over freely."

The duo is entering intriguing musical territory with their jazz backgrounds attached.

"The acoustic guitar makes [our compositions] a little more deceiving," Bono said. "You might not realize the harmonies are as obscure as they are because you're hearing them from an instrument with a soothing timbre. It lends itself more to folk music or bossa nova. The jazz element in our music can be disguised if you don't have the ear for it."

—Ken Micallef

San Francisco Chronicle

Trombonist Natalie Cressman honors jazz pioneer

By Andrew Gilbert

Updated 4:57 pm, Wednesday, February 24, 2016



Measured by the size and scope of her musical contributions, Melba Liston is singularly qualified for the lead spot in SFJazz's celebration of Women's History Month. The trombonist-arranger came out of the Los Angeles scene in the early 1940s and immediately took her place alongside the most innovative artists of the era.

The only female horn player to perform and record with top-tier big bands — she put in serious road time with Gerald Wilson, Dizzy Gillespie and Quincy Jones — Liston made her most profound impact as an arranger, particularly through her long-running collaboration with pianist-composer Randy Weston.

Beyond jazz, Liston pioneered work in reggae and contributed gorgeous charts for **Ray Charles**, **Marvin Gaye** and the **Supremes** as an arranger for Motown in the 1960s. But she recorded only one album as a leader, and today Liston is all too often overlooked (she died in New York City in 1999 at age 73).

“For decades she was the only woman doing what she was doing,” says San Francisco native and now New York trombonist and vocalist Natalie Cressman, who pays tribute to Liston with two performances at the **SFJazz Center’s Joe Henderson Lab** on Thursday, March 3. “It feels like she should be a household name.”

Something of a trailblazer herself, the 24-year-old Cressman is the daughter of Santana trombonist and sound engineer Jeff Cressman and Brazilophile vocalist Sandy Cressman (who performs at Oakland’s Sound Room on March 18 and the **Red Poppy Art House** on March 19). A graduate of San Francisco’s **Ruth Asawa School of the Arts** public high school, Natalie played with the Monterey Jazz Festival’s **Next Generation Jazz Orchestra**, **SFJazz High School All-Stars**, Latin Jazz Youth Ensemble and other acclaimed ensembles before heading east to study at the **Manhattan School of Music** and tour with Phish’s Trey Anastasio and playing gigs with jazz stars like **Nicholas Payton** and **Peter Apfelbaum**.

Cressman, who has two albums of her own under her belt, is forging a sleek and dance-minded sound inflected by her love of Afro-Cuban, Brazilian and West African rhythms, indie rock, jazz and funk. She often divides her time between her horn and vocals in her own music, but for her Liston tribute, Cressman is focusing on instrumental material backed by a Bay Area band featuring trumpeter **Erik Jekabson**, pianist **Colin Hogan**, bassist **Tommy Folen** and drummer **Eric Garland**.

“I’m going to try to cover music spanning her whole career, including groundbreaking work with Randy Weston from the album ‘Uhuru Africa,’” Cressman says of the Liston tribute. “She primarily arranged for larger ensembles and I’ve got a quintet, so I’m trying to re-create the arrangements so that her voice really speaks.”

Though she loathed confrontation, Liston was a fierce creative combatant who succeeded on multiple fronts despite ill treatment, sometimes brutal (Liston suffered numerous sexual assaults from bandmates).

Liston often described arriving in New York City in 1949 summoned by Dizzy Gillespie, who made a point of championing great female jazz players. As the story goes, some of the men in Gillespie's big band grumbled when Liston walked into her first rehearsal, asking in loudly enough for her to hear, "What's this bitch doing here?" The trumpeter ignored their complaints and asked Liston to hand out one of her arrangements. When the band was unable to navigate the difficult chart, Gillespie smiled and said, "Who's the bitch now?"

Liston isn't a stranger to longtime Bay Area jazz fans. SFJazz's earlier incarnation, the San Francisco Jazz Festival, showcased her work with Weston in 1995. In the midst of a creative burst building on their groundbreaking jazz-meets-African-music collaborations three decades earlier, Liston was finally getting her due. On projects like 1960's "Uhuru Africa," she didn't get prominent billing despite her essential contributions, but on 1993's "Volcano Blues" (Antilles), Weston made sure her name and photo appeared alongside his on the cover.

Cressman knows she's heir to a jazz scene opened up by Liston, but she notes that female horn players still face scrutiny and skepticism.

"I've definitely felt a lot of discrimination as one of the few female trombonists on the scene," Cressman says. "Reading about Melba was like discovering this long-lost sister. I loved her no-nonsense attitude. She walked into a room and blew them away with her writing and playing."

Andrew Gilbert is a freelance writer.

Natalie Cressman Quintet: Tribute to Melba Liston: 7 and 8:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 3. \$25. SFJazz Center's Joe Henderson Lab, 201 Franklin St., S.F. (866) 920-5299. www.sfjazz.org.

The Boston Globe

Arts

Trombonist Natalie Cressman lures jam band fans to jazz

By Jeremy D. Goodwin

| GLOBE CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 06, 2014



Natalie Cressman was doing homework in her dorm room one evening during her first year at the Manhattan School of Music, where she was studying jazz trombone, when she answered the phone — and her workload suddenly got a lot heavier.

On the line was Trey Anastasio, front man of jam band behemoth Phish, who had a job for her: playing trombone and singing backup in his eponymous solo group.

In nearly five years of periodic touring behind Anastasio, she's accumulated a bunch of fans hailing from a musical world she'd never planned on wading into. Now, she's hoping to bring some of those new fans back with her — toward the realm of jazz.

"Even though it's not the fan base that I might have had if I'd just come out of a purely jazz background, I'm really happy to have these people connected to me," Cressman, 23, says over the phone from her apartment in Brooklyn.

Fans who've seen her play with Anastasio, or sit in with other groups in the jam band scene, might be surprised by what they hear when they turn up for her solo shows. (She plays Cafe 939 with her septet on Thursday.) Though she's no traditionalist and rightly points to her outside influences, her work sits comfortably enough within the big tent of jazz.

"So much of my fans' engagement and interest has come through Trey," she says. "It's not that they don't enjoy [my sound], but I definitely can't be at a festival where all of the bands are funk and jam-based. That's kind of a shame, just because I'd love to get my music out in front of more ears, but my own band gives me a chance to really just be me."

After a debut album that focused mainly on instrumental music, Cressman's sophomore effort ("Turn the Sea," released in March) introduces a new focus on her vocal ability. It's part of her effort to appeal to music fans of her own generation. "I'm just trying to bring this beautiful music into the new millennium," Cressman says.

"I have friends my age that I have get out to see jazz," she continues, "and they'll enjoy themselves, but they don't necessarily know what they're supposed to be listening for. I think having a strong melody and lyrics really helps because it puts it into a [familiar] language and the musical story becomes even more obvious."

Though her singing style comes out of the tradition of vocal jazz, a contemporary feel seeps through the new record. After penultimate tune “Stolen Away” surges forward on an Afrobeat-influenced horn chart, the album closes with a remix of its title track by New York-based producer JNTHN STEIN that suggests Cressman’s latent interest in electronic music.

“I feel like Natalie’s part of a new generation of musicians who have intersected with the jazz world, but whose vocabulary is really broad,” says Peter Apfelbaum, the bandleader and a longtime family friend and musical mentor. “She has all the goods in terms of technique, but is really pan-stylistic.”

Cressman’s parents are Jeff, also a trombone player, and Sandy, a jazz vocalist with a particular interest in Brazilian music. Her father is a longtime collaborator with Santana, and once played a tour behind Anastasio.

Her parents’ connections created some unusual opportunities for Natalie, but these didn’t just result in on-off appearances for the sake of experience and resume building. When she subbed for regular trombonist Josh Roseman in Apfelbaum’s big band, the impressed leader kept her on even after Roseman returned. Jeff first suggested his daughter for the open chair in Anastasio’s group, but this earned her only an impromptu audition — which she promptly crushed.

“From the second she walked in the room, it was over,” says trumpeter/vocalist Jennifer Hartswick, who was tasked by Anastasio with auditioning Cressman in a live setting. Hartswick told Cressman to show up at an Upper East Side bar where she was playing, and had her join the band as soon as she arrived, mid-song. They meshed instantly.

“I had made plans with Trey to call him in the morning and talk to him about it, and I was like, I’m not waiting until the morning,” recalls Hartswick, who first worked with Anastasio as a teenager herself. “I called him at midnight and said, this girl is the real deal. People like to talk about the fact that she’s young and beautiful and all of that, but really, she brings a depth and a maturity to music everywhere she goes.”

As a young, female, trombone-playing bandleader, Cressman knows she stands out on multiple fronts.

“I’ve just kind of gotten used to feeling a little bit like the oddball in so many ways,” she says with a laugh, “and that’s totally fine with me.”

Natalie Cressman

The Red Room at Cafe 939, 617-747-2261. <http://www.cafe939.com>

Also performing: Paige Chaplin

Date of concert: Thursday

Ticket price: \$12

Natalie Cressman Fuses Jazz, Indie, and Jam Band Music with Sophomore Release *Turn the Sea*

Posted: 07/26/2013 6:09 pm

By Molly Fosco



If you haven't heard of [Natalie Cressman](#), you definitely will soon. A Bay Area native, born to two musician parents -- Jeff and Sandy Cressman, Natalie grew up with music in her DNA. Recently graduating from the Manhattan School of Music, she's made a name for herself in New York City as quite a talented trombone player. Natalie has now begun transitioning into more of a singer/songwriter role with the release of her second studio album *Turn the Sea*.

Generally associated with the jam band category, Natalie's skills as a trombonist have allowed her to seamlessly fit right into a variety of musical ensembles. She's had stints performing with Lettuce, Van Ghost, Dumstaphunk, and most impressively, Trey Anastasio of the ultimate legendary jam band, Phish. Touring with Trey has gained Natalie the recognition she needed to jumpstart her career, and she's definitely taking advantage of it.

Since the release of her sophomore studio album *Turn the Sea*, recorded at Candid Music Studios in Brooklyn, Natalie is bringing her music home next month on a [west coast tour](#) that kicks off August 11th at the [San Jose Jazz Festival](#). *Turn the Sea* is certainly peppered with some of the jam band essence Natalie is known for, but overall the album takes on a very different vibe than her previous release, and from the majority of performances she's given in the past. The strong jazz substance in her music has always been consistent, but this album is bursting with it more than ever. Her veteran skills as a trombonist are clear, but what's even more impressive is her vocal performance and talents as a lyricist. The sound of her voice gives each track a very indie feel to it, which compliments the jazz melodies in a very unique way. At times her lyrics almost convey a feeling of loneliness and desperation, but with the generally upbeat, colorful music that accompanies it you wouldn't know it upon first listen. Natalie's cover of Bon Iver's *Blindsided* on this album is the cheeriest version of the usually somber and melancholy song I've ever heard.

Turn the Sea ends with a remix of the title track by another Bay Area native/New York transplant, electronic artist [JNTHN STEIN](#). Still maintaining its jazz roots, the track has elements of EDM in just the right places making it discernibly the most danceable track on the album. In a recent interview with [Jamband.com](#), Natalie revealed that she's been enjoying electronic music more and more these days and has even begun to work with Abelton. Perhaps an electronic album is in her future?

SAN DIEGO Reader



Off

the barre and into the bar, Cressman's got music in her genes.

A new look for jazz: Natalie Cressman

Trombone vocalist slides into Dizzy's P.B. digs

By *Dave Good*, July 8, 2015

The new face of jazz (or at least one of them) has tattoos and wears yoga pants. Raised on Brazilian and Afro-Cuban rhythms, with straight-ahead instrumental chops worthy of a Wycliffe Gordon and yet equally divested enough to perform with the jam band [Phish](#), and all the while capable of laying a deep vocal read on an oldie like “Goodbye Pork Pie Hat” — say hello to [Natalie Cressman](#). Still in her 20s, Cressman reminds a listener of the high-octane Lincoln Center class and freelance spirit of [Esperanza Spalding](#), but with a trombone instead of a double bass. Is Cressman the future of jazz? No. That’s too heavy a burden to lay on any one performer.

In it, but not of it, describes the approach that Cressman and so many of her contemporaries bring to contemporary jazz. Jazz music is not doomed and will survive of its own accord. Surely there are Charlie Parker sycophants enough to ensure that the accomplishments of that

bygone era will be around for generations to come, albeit in a kind of museum setting. It's the fresh approach by young jazz players who were raised on indie rock that interest me most at present.

Naturally, Natalie Cressman's backstory includes deep music roots: her dad played 'bone in Santana and her mom is a jazz singer. An injury took Cressman out of her first love, ballet, and therefore her development as a musician began somewhat late in the game, but so be it. Consider her multitude of childhood influences a sort of cross-training, such that when she began to woodshed a music instrument in earnest, the finished result came out as if effortless. Her trombone is world-class, but her singing voice is another thing entirely, an empathic entity that channels the ages. Cressman's is a flawless act that can only get better with time and age. Yep, I smell a Grammy — someday.

The Mercury News

The Newspaper of Silicon Valley
MercuryNews.com

Natalie Cressman steps into San Jose Jazz Festival spotlight

By Richard Scheinin rscheinin@mercurynews.com San Jose Mercury News Posted: MercuryNews.com



Trombonist Natalie Cressman was just 18 when she began playing with Trey Anastasio, the guitarist and singer from the band Phish. At the same time she was starting jazz studies at the Manhattan School of Music, juggling classes with touring -- music theory at 8 a.m. after a late night onstage with a world-famous jam band.

San Francisco-bred Cressman, who performs with her own band Sunday at the San Jose Jazz Festival, has learned a lot about connecting the dots between jazz, funk, rock and more from Anastasio, and she applies a similar strategy to her own music.

"I really like finding that fine line between genres," she says. "That's where I'm most comfortable, and it's not that I'm trying not to play jazz. It's just that I like weaving styles together ... joining musical worlds."

Now 22, Cressman -- also a singer and songwriter -- springs from an impressive line of musical DNA. Mother Sandy Cressman is a well-known Brazilian-jazz vocalist; father Jeff Cressman is a recording engineer and trombonist, a longtime member of Carlos Santana's band.

Natalie, who recently played New York's Apollo Theater with Wycliffe Gordon, a superstar of jazz trombone, has released a new album mixed by her father, "Turn the Sea."

Anastasio has called her "an incredible player." Multi-instrumentalist/composer Peter Apfelbaum, a veteran genre-blender in whose band Cressman performs, says, "She just gets better every year, and she's amazingly versatile -- one of those musicians who's confident working in all kinds of styles."

Trained as a straight-ahead jazz player -- while in high school at Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts, she made pretty much all the regional and statewide all-star groups -- she extended her listening in New York to indie singers and bands, including St. Vincent and Dirty Projectors, while focusing on her own songwriting and production. Her new album is what she calls "indie jazz" -- creative improvisation meets pop soundscapes and electronically enhanced vocals.

Cressman has been "immersed in music" from the time she was born, and even before. Sandy Cressman performed throughout her pregnancy with Natalie; her water broke shortly after a performance with a salsa band.

Natalie remembers cozy family evenings at home while growing up, watching "Black Orpheus," the classic Brazilian film with music by Antônio Carlos Jobim and Luiz Bonfá. It helped form the soundtrack of her childhood, along with Brazilian singer Elis Regina and Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon ("Graceland" was a big one), the jazz fusion band Weather Report, trumpeter Miles Davis ("Kind of Blue") and pianist Thelonious Monk.

She recalls tagging along to her parents' gigs. (One popular family anecdote has her falling asleep inside a bass violin case during a show on Treasure Island.) When Natalie was about 9, her father joined Santana's band: "So I'd bring my little friends to Shoreline, and we'd get to hang out backstage," she says.

She studied trombone at summer camps, moving up through the ranks at the Stanford Jazz Workshop's annual programs, for which she has been a faculty member. Mentored as a teen by the Bay Area's top trombonists -- Wayne Wallace,

Marty Wehner, Mal Sharpe, her dad and others -- she began getting calls from Apfelbaum and percussionist Pete Escovedo.

"She started to scare me," jokes her father.

When Natalie was 18 and ready to move to New York, Jeff Cressman decided to give up his trombone spot in the Trey Anastasio Band -- and recommended his daughter as the replacement. She auditioned and won the gig, but wasn't always comfortable in her early days on the road.

"I was kind of shy, and even though I felt I was pretty well equipped to take the job," she says, "I wasn't sure how to handle myself, and I felt like I was coming across onstage as weaker and meeker than I would be if I were just playing with my friends in a practice room."

Mean-spirited bloggers didn't help; they wrote about her as if she were "fresh meat."

She stuck with it, finding there could be "a lightness to playing music" even in a pressured situation. Still performing with Anastasio, she notes that "there are so many ways to play one line of music. In Trey's band, when I'm singing, I'm blending with two or three other voices all the time, and I'm making constant adjustments to match without sticking out."

She tries to bring that same "microscopic awareness" to her own music. Her studies at the Manhattan School of Music grounded her in jazz but also included classes in orchestral arranging and East Indian ensemble playing. She graduated last spring. Now based in New York, she is beginning to explore electronic music and spending ever more time with her songs and lyrics as well as putting in the requisite hours on trombone. She recently bought a ukulele, so she can "write songs on the go."

Cressman makes "the music her muse is telling her to make," her father says. "No one has put her in a box yet. She is free to define what really rocks her world musically. With her experience and talent, there's going to be a unique sound offered to us. Who knows where it will lead?"

Details: Natalie Cressman at the San Jose Jazz Festival When: 4 p.m. Aug. 11 Where: Gordon Biersch Stage (East San Fernando Street, between First and Second streets) Tickets: Included in daily festival admission: \$20 general, \$5 ages 5 to 12; <http://jazzfest.sanjosejazz.org> Also: 8 p.m. Aug. 19, Freight & Salvage, 2020 Addison St., Berkeley; \$16.50; 510-644-2020, www.thefreight.org

Jazz Weekly

Creative Music and Other Forms of Avante Garde

www.jazzweekly.com

Natalie

Cressman & Secret Garden: Unfolding

July 27, 2012

By George W. Harris



Lesson #1: Don't judge a book by its cover. She looks like someone who's going to be doing Janice Ian covers, and the name of the group (Secret Garden) just oozes of doe-eyed female "feelings" and "relationships." Well, pop in the first song, buddy, and this lady plays a trombone (which you can barely see on the cover photo) like Curtis Fulller in drag! She and her team of Ivan Rosenberg/tp, Chad Lefkowitz-Brown/ts, Pascal Le Boeuf/key, RubenSamama/b, and Jake Goldbas/dr go through the instrumental hard boppers like "Flip" like it's a reunion of The Jazz Messengers. Yes, she does sing, but her voice has an alluring smoky quality that adds to, and not detracts from, the mood. A clever reading of "Honeysuckle Rose," gets the mood just right, and "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" is as languid as all get out. Impressive on a plethora of fronts. Surprisingly appealing.

San Francisco Chronicle

Natalie Cressman's talent is in her DNA

Lee Hildebrand

Published 2:39 p.m., Thursday, August 2, 2012



Natalie Cressman is, one might say, a chip off the old blocks. Like her father, Santana sideman Jeff Cressman, she plays trombone. Like her mother, jazz vocalist Sandy Cressman, she sings. She does both with aplomb on her debut CD, "Unfolding," recorded in October in Brooklyn and set for release this week on the Cressman Music label in San Francisco. Cressman, who turned 21 last month, composed seven of its nine selections and wrote richly textured horn-section charts for herself, a trumpeter and a tenor saxophonist. Her dad flew to New York to engineer the sessions. Unlike many young people who ignore or reject music their parents like, Cressman embraced the jazz, Brazilian and Afro-Cuban sounds that surrounded her while growing up in San Francisco.

"It was never forced on me, which I think is the first secret to why I'm doing it," she says while sitting with her mother at the dining room table of their Crocker-Amazon home near the San Francisco/Daly City border. It's a clear day, and the room's picture window provides a sweeping view that includes Twin Peaks and the Pacific Ocean.

"A lot of times, especially with parents who are musicians, they almost expect their kids to go into it," she adds. "I really liked anything creative. For a while, it was acting, and then for a very long time it was ballet dancing. Music was always there, but sometimes on the back burner."

Snuggling up to the trombone

Cressman remembers snuggling up to her father's trombone on the couch when she was a young child and placing her lips on the mouthpiece, as well as singing three-part harmonies with her mother and little sister. She began taking piano lessons at 5 and took up trombone in elementary school at 9.

She made her stage debut at 8, singing in the [American Conservatory Theater's](#) production of "A Christmas Carol," which she would do for two more seasons. At 11, she sang in the children's

chorus of the pre-Broadway run at the [Curran Theatre](#) of [Baz Luhrmann's](#) production of Puccini's "La Boheme." She soon tired of musical theater, however.

"At a certain point, it becomes about singing loud and singing big," she says of performing in musicals. "That wasn't my thing. The people I grew up listening to were bossa nova singers like Elis Regina. And [Joni Mitchell](#) is one of my favorite artists of all time." (She does an R&B-tinged treatment of [Mitchell's](#) arrangement with lyrics of [Charles Mingus'](#) "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" on her CD.)

Passion for ballet

Ballet became Cressman's primary passion. She studied daily at the [City Ballet School](#) after her regular classes at the [Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts](#), but she turned her attention back to trombone after ripping cartilage in her left foot during a school play. She was soon subbing for her dad or trombonist [Marty Weiner](#) in Orquesta Candela and in [Pete Escovedo's](#) band, as well as playing in a number of youth jazz and Latin music bands. Her membership in the 2009 Grammy Jazz Ensembles led to a full-tuition scholarship to the [Manhattan School of Music](#).

A resident of West Harlem for the past three years while attending school in New York, Cressman is home on summer vacation. It's been a busy one. Shortly after arriving at her parents' home in early June, she got a call to go on the road for two weeks with Van Ghost, an eclectic Chicago band in which she does background vocals and plays trombone. In July, she spent a week teaching jazz to youngsters at the elite [Nueva School](#) in Hillsborough, followed by two weeks of administrative work at the [Stanford Jazz Workshop](#).

Performing with Mom

She also performed with her mother's group, Homenagem Brasileira Feminina, at the Fillmore Jazz Festival and at Osteria Divino, an Italian restaurant in Sausalito.

Cressman's schedule in New York has been just as hectic. When not in classes at the Manhattan School, where her instructors have included trombonists [Wycliffe Gordon](#) and [Luis Bonilla](#), trumpeter [Laurie Frink](#), drummer [John Riley](#) and Brazilian percussionist [Rogerio Bocalo](#), she has done three three-week tours with Phish singer-guitarist [Trey Anastasio's](#) band - she's featured on his current CD "TAB at the TAB" - and freelanced around the city with trumpeter [Nicholas Payton](#) and with former Berkeley multi-instrumentalist [Peter Apfelbaum's](#) New York Hieroglyphics Ensemble. Last year at the [Apollo Theater](#), she participated in a 1930s-style variety show led by Gordon in which she sang "I'll Be Seeing You," then picked up her trombone and improvised. She recalls hearing gasps from the surprised audience.

She formed her own band, Secret Garden, two years ago in New York, initially as a vehicle for her to hear her own compositions performed. The sextet, with several of its New York members plus a Bay Area rhythm section, will make its local debut Friday at the [Freight & Salvage](#) in Berkeley, followed by a set next Sunday at the San Jose Jazz Festival. Apfelbaum, who was best man at her parents' wedding, will be playing in her band in Berkeley, as well as headlining the show in a duet performance with drummer [Josh Jones](#).

Although "Unfolding" will not be officially released until Friday, the CD has already picked up

play on more than 140 radio stations, thanks to a Chicago promotion firm. And Cressman's Massachusetts publicist helped her land a paragraph and several photos in a story about women musicians in the online July edition of [Russian GQ Magazine](#).

Creative control

"I'm very comfortable being a sideman and stepping back and trying to play other people's music the best way I know how, but this was a chance for me to have creative control," she says of the disc. "I was really obsessed with the idea of making it a jazz album that could appeal to people who may not be jazz listeners. I just wanted to make something that shows me as me - my singing style and my writing style and my playing style as I would like it to be."



Natalie Cressman and Secret Garden: Unfolding (2012)

By **JEFF DAYTON-JOHNSON**, Published: August 15, 2012



Looking for antecedents for trombonist/vocalist Natalie Cressman? *All About Jazz*'s [C. Michael Bailey](#) correctly [points us](#) to [Jack Teagarden](#), the original singing trombonist. And, in fact, Cressman finds plenty of opportunity in the funkier passages of *Unfolding*, her debut album, to deploy a fluid and full Teagarden-like sound on the instrument.

But Cressman—twenty years old and a student at the Manhattan School of Music at the time of *Unfolding*'s release—also suggests a more contemporary reference: [Esperanza Spalding](#), the superstar singing bassist. As with much of Spalding's vocals on her first record—the fine [Junjo](#) (Ayva Musica, 2006)—Cressman's wordless and vaguely Brazilian vocals on the madrigal-like "Echo" sound like sonic accents, not the stuff of a "lead singer." That said, other examples of singing on

this record sound more like Spalding's subsequent albums, wherein she established herself as a bona fide singer.

Cressman even pays homage here to [Joni Mitchell](#), with a thoughtful and successfully rearranged version of Mitchell's vocal version of [Charles Mingus](#)' "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat." It's a great reach back, from the vantage point of 2012, through Mitchell's 1979 version, to Mingus' 1959 original (Mitchell's version can be found on her *Mingus* (Asylum, 1979); it's closely based on Mingus' from his *Mingus Ah Um* (Columbia, 1959), and follows both Mingus' composed melody as well as [John Handy](#)'s tenor sax solo).

Cressman's vocal agility is furthermore on display in the difficult leaps and intervals of several compositions, her tone clear and true and unadorned.

Pianist [Fats Waller](#)'s "Honeysuckle Rose," meanwhile, is given a funk makeover not unlike the music of pianist [Robert Glasper](#)'s Experiment; indeed, the comparison also reveals the attractive, Glasper-like qualities in pianist [Pascal Le Boeuf](#)'s playing here (Le Boeuf, 25 years old for the session, is the oldest member of Cressman's Secret Garden band).

The band is well-rehearsed and dominated, in a way, by the unsightly forward drummer Jake Goldblas; he doesn't take much prompting to boil over, and it can be pretty exciting. Saxophonist [Peter Apfelbaum](#)—like Cressman, a traveler on the Bay Area/New York jazz corridor—guests for a fiery solo on "That Kind." Throughout, the sound is mostly acoustic, mostly mainstream with hints of Latin and rock.

Unfolding shares the strengths and weaknesses of a lot of very strong debuts: highly attentive solos, carefully crafted arrangements and spirited performances on the plus side; coupled with a certain lack of focus and melodic interest in the original compositions. Cressman will only get better, as trombonist, singer, composer and leader, and that process will be accelerated with further apprenticeship with more seasoned leaders. With the release of *Unfolding*, her phone should be ringing off the hook.

Track Listing: Flip; Whistle Song; Honeysuckle Rose; Echo; Skylight; Goodbye Pork Pie Hat; Waking; Reaching For Home; That Kind.

Personnel: Natalie Cressman: trombone, vocals; Ivan Rosenberg: trumpet; Chad Lefkowitz-Brown: tenor saxophone (1-8); Peter Apfelbaum: tenor saxophone (9); Pascal Le Boeuf: piano, Fender Rhodes, claps; Ruben Samama: acoustic bass, claps; Jake Goldblas: drums, percussion, claps; Zach Gould: claps.

Woman of Indie: Natalie Cressman – Unfolding

Posted on March 16, 2012 by [Kerriann Curtis](#)



Natalie Cressman is, to put it simply, an extraordinarily talented young woman. If I were to list all of her accomplishments and achievements it would take over the entire review (and we do have a word limit). Cressman is a gifted trombonist, composer, and singer and here is the kicker; she is only 20 years old! She is inspired by the music of Brazil, Cuba, India and also American jazz and folk and her music is a direct reflection of her inspirations. *Unfolding* is the creation of Cressman and Secret Garden. Picture yourself in a beautiful jazz club in the heart of New York City, press play and you are transported there.

Close your eyes, and listen. It's hard to believe the person playing in front of you with such gusto is only 20 years old. This album is a terrific showcase for her abilities, and she plays with such maturity and capability well beyond her years.

"That Kind" is the last song on the album, but it really isn't to be overlooked. Highlighting her talents in the best way, it's a strong closer, which is why it is being mentioned first. Her band that she plays with, Secret Garden are all equally

talented musicians and each get their chance to shine through out each piece on the album.

“Flip” is another great song that is easy to listen to and features a phenomenal piano solo by Pascal Le Boeuf. Like mentioned before, everyone in this band is truly special.

“Honeysuckle Rose” shows off Cressman’s vocal chops. Her voice is smooth as the honey she is singing of in this song. “Whistle Song” is also a fantastic tune that shows off Cressman’s vocals as a jazz singer. Singing up and down the scales, her voice has the capability to become as great as some of the Jazz singers we all know and love.

Once again, everyone else does get a chance to shine, and that brings the music to another level. Cressman even plays the trombone in-between singing to remind us of her supreme talent.

What is fantastic about *Unfolding* is though it’s a jazz record, the songs are so beautiful and easily comprehensible that for a moment you don’t even realize that it’s jazz you are listening to. Even those who don’t have an ear for this genre will find the music enjoyable. When listening you feel what Cressman is playing, and when there are no lyrics, the music speaks just as clearly. Keep tabs on this young talent, and support her in anyway that you can. Listen to her music, spread the word and spread the love. Musicians as talented as Cressman are a breath of fresh air and not as few and far in between as some may think. You just have to dig a little deeper to find these hidden gems.