

# Rising From Roots In Fusion and Jazz

Marilyn Scott

# W

rite this down. This is great," insists Tom Emery, Marilyn Scott's east-coast publicist. We, together with the rest of Marilyn's

respective entourages of Ally Shively and Dr. Ruth, are sitting in the green room at the taping of the *Fat Daddies* show in New York. Tom continues: "I spoke to Char last night (Char, for the uninitiated, is a psychic with a hefty price tag and an eight-month waiting list) and she said, 'That M woman... she blows... She's going to be big.'"

Marilyn is in makeup. A good-looking blonde with Golden Horse hair, she smiles amiably into the mirror and greets me with a drawing hello. I know we'll talk later as I wave and depart. Her manager tells me she's preoccupied with thinking about what to ask Dr. Ruth if she has the chance.

Marilyn is the last guest to go on. Wearing pumps and a tailored outfit, she lip-synchs the first track on her CD, a song recently co-written by Bust Badtrach. We watch her on a monitor from the green room. Quickly it's over and her-eyes blink on back to the hotel.

Scott has been keeping this kind of schedule since her album, *Take Me with You*, was released ago. With its smooth groove and friendly melodies, it represents a powerful New Adult Contemporary effort as Scott builds on her fusion foundations, leaning as far into pop as possible without seeming too thin. Her record consequently relies on respected peers: producer George Duke, singer and songwriter Brenda Russell, Jimmy Ferrante and Russell Hurlip of the California fusion band The Yellowjackets who extend their longtime writing and performing collaboration with Scott, and Brazilian singer-guitarist Don Caymmi who produced a cover of Stevie Wonder's "Bird of Beauty" and co-wrote with Scott "That's the Way it Should Be," a joban waltz. The album, in fact, was two years in the making as Scott waited for her personnel to be available.

This array of connections is but a product of Scott's typical musical experiences. Born and raised in southern California, Scott moved to the Bay Area for art school and there paid her way by singing in top 40 and Latin bands.

Her first recording work was doing studio lead and back-up vocals for *Power of Power*. Back in L.A., Scott's fortunes continued to shine and she began writing, recording and performing with everyone from Ella James to Spino Gyra. Several of her interpretations of "great" songs were featured on film soundtracks.

Some well-timed tours to Japan, however, became the catalyst for Scott's rebirth. As she describes it, "The Japanese saved me." The accolades she garnered from these jazz club dates led to several CDs which at last got Warner Brothers' attention. As hungry as Scott still claims to be, it is not surprising to hear her say she intends to run with the opportunity. "She's grateful to have it, it's not all that often that anyone gets creatively formed in prison 'the next day of blue-eyed soul.' With a repertoire that flickers between sweet and smoky, Scott covers a lot of territory on this album from a successional rendition of "The Summer Knows" to the socially aware "Madras Man." My favorites are the Brazil-flavored tunes and I especially get a kick out of Scott's Portuguese.

The strategy at this point is to broaden the market for Marilyn Scott, though this probably means one of two things depending on your perspective. For the suits, the idea is to introduce Marilyn to the pop market. For Scott, it's about proving her range. "When I do interviews at radio stations and they ask me what I want played, I usually ask for tunes that have not been played, to give people who are listening and don't know me yet a chance to hear something else. As usual, the singles are the most commercial tracks on the project but I like for people to hear that I can do things that are deeper. I can and I like to be harder-edged. I could and I'd like to. A lot of my songs are but the harder edge is not always what a company would prefer to market."

Wide usage is something of which Scott is aware, more important is that she try to carry a message with her music. Glassy-eyed Scott may be, but let's get something straight, the diva is down to earth. She affirms the personal convictions that underlie her choices. "Without getting too preachy I try to look at things people often forget to look at. My goal is always to raise consciousness while playing great music." This doesn't make me an hip service. Scott seems to operate by ancient karma rules: her respect for others seems genuine and she is not caught up in herself. Walking down the street with her, I watched as a paper bag blew across her path — she picked it up and carried it to the next trash can.