

Tom Lellis: Biography

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Tom Lellis began singing professionally at the age of 15. By age 21, he was working on bills with Ray Charles and Gregory Hines and a 15-piece big band. After 9 years as a stand up singer, Tom began intensive piano studies. Three years later he was singing, playing and opening for Dizzy Gillespie, Bill Evans, Jimmy Smith and other jazz greats. As a lyricist, he first put words to and recorded works by McCoy Tyner, Keith Jarrett, Wayne Shorter, Chick Corea, Dave Brubeck and others. Tom's debut album was released on Inner City Records in 1981 and became an instant fixture in London's jazz disco's where thousands danced to "Lucky Southern". The album featured world-class musicians, drummer Jack DeJohnette and bassist Eddie Gomez. Double Entendre, his second album with these same great musicians was released in 1991 in the U.S. and in Japan where the press cited him "for creating an ideal vocal form". The album subsequently received a 5-star rating from many online reviewers.

With the release of his 1993 Concord recording, Taken to Heart, Tom's interests expanded into Brazilian music. His collaboration with Brazilian guitar master and composer, Toninho Horta, resulted in "Mountain Flight" which has been further published in the Latin Real Book and CD.

Tom has been voted to the Down Beat International Critic's Poll, and dubbed by numerous writers and critics a "triple threat", Singing Jazz, The Singers and their Styles (Miller-Freeman Books, 1998) quotes him extensively.

Tom's recording "Skylark" was named The "Top Vocal Jazz CD of 2002" by the International Association of Jazz Education Journal and was New York's WBGO's "Most requested record of 2002". The CD of his original works, lyrics and concepts with the 52-piece, stringed, Netherlands Metropole Orchestra conducted by John Clayton and arranged by Grammy winner, Vince Mendoza and others is in release.

Southern Exposure was named Jazziz Magazine's "Best CDs of 2004" and the Jazz Education Journal's "Best Vocal CDs of 2004." It is a collection of Brazilian/jazz with Horta, Dave Kikoski, Kenny Werner, and Romero LuBambo on Adventure Music. Avenue of the Americas released in 2006 features all Tom's facets and arranging creativity with his lyrics to Brazilian and jazz composers and reworked standards and pop from the Beatles to Ashford and Simpson and U2. Featuring Horta, Richard Bona and Gary Fisher, it has been named to Jazziz Magazine's "Critic's Best CDs of 2006" list (Jan 07).