

Cindy Scott *Renewal in New Orleans*

When vocalist Cindy Scott quit her job as an executive at an international corporation in Houston and moved to New Orleans to pursue a master's degree in jazz studies, she made a pact with herself.

"I was going to be completely fearless and do anything I wanted to do," she says, seated before an electric piano in her home studio in the Mid-City neighborhood. "I have no regrets. Did I ever sing a wrong note? Yeah, but I was here to grow."

Scott quickly entrenched herself in the local music scene. She earned her degree and began teaching at the University of New Orleans as an adjunct professor. And just five years after leaving her corporate career behind, she released *Let The Devil Take Tomorrow* (Catahoula Records), which was named Best Contemporary Jazz Album of 2010 at the Best of the Beat Awards (presented by the New Orleans magazine *Offbeat*).

Looking back, the move required a lot more fearlessness than she had anticipated. Scott arrived to start her new life in January 2005, just seven months before Hurricane Katrina. Although she lost her belongings and much of her new city to flooding, the challenges of rebuilding her life alongside other resilient New Orleanians ultimately helped define her—and her work.

"We came back in January after the storm," says Scott, her voice warm and prone to wispy Southern lilts. "I wanted to finish school. I felt like New Orleans needed us. I don't know how I could ever have felt as connected to the city if I hadn't gone through that."

As she began performing around town, that bond became a driving force of her music, and her allegiance to the goal of expressing herself freely helped forge a new sound. She drew inspiration from the music around her, taking a note pad out to clubs and jotting down ideas that might become points of departure for her own music. Scott practiced scatting and uncovered jazz underpinnings in music that moved her, whatever the genre. She wrote and recorded songs about the emotions she felt after the storm, and the places she loved throughout the city.

All of these elements are evident in her recent work, as her voice moves seamlessly between influences, holding a masterfully controlled vibrato on one phrase before dipping into a bluesy purr on the next.

"There's so much freedom here," she says. "You can create music that's super straightahead and people like it. You can make music that's crazy, free, wacky stuff with loop pedals, and people like that, too. If you're tryin' to be creative and really open yourself up, it's OK here."

That kind of artistic risk-taking is at the heart of *Let The Devil Take Tomorrow*. Producer and guitarist Brian Seeger describes the disc as an attempt "to bring new sounds into a traditional jazz vernacular."

"Cindy brings a unique skill and artistic set to the community," Seeger explains. "I hear other great jazz singers, and I don't feel like I have any sense of them as a person. If you get so steeped in tradition, there's no room for your own personal expression. With Cindy, there's a lot of depth."

Despite her significant tenure as a professional musician, Scott feels she's on new ground with her career. As she puts it, "I'm coming out of my cocoon."

—Jennifer Odell

