

Review: Dianne Reeves Leads Journey of Jazz History at Rose Hall

By **STEPHEN HOLDEN** FEB. 16, 2015

Trains of musical thought that wind from one part of the world into another and from one century to the next: A sense of boarding and changing trains on a far-reaching journey ran through [Dianne Reeves](#)'s concert at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Rose Hall on Friday evening.

The most admired jazz diva since the heyday of Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday, Ms. Reeves has a keen sense of herself as a custodian of a jazz vocal tradition that has fallen into disarray as the boundaries between genres have dissolved. She may be a preservationist, but her definition of jazz encompasses rhythm and blues, reggae and salsa.

On Friday she paid tribute to two luminaries in that original triumvirate: Holiday, on the occasion of her centennial, and Vaughan, to whom she has most frequently been compared, and who also had startlingly resonant notes in a baritone register. Ms. Reeves's band — the musical director and keyboardist Peter Martin, Peter Sprague on guitar, Reginald Veal on bass and Terreon Gully on drums — shares her concept of jazz songs as territories whose borders are ripe for expansion. Almost everything she does has the aspect of a semi-improvised tone poem.

The most elaborate journey, "Tango," was a near-wordless, shape-shifting tribute to Celia Cruz and Miriam Makeba that demonstrated Ms. Reeves's formidable rhythmic dexterity in a piece that traveled the globe from Africa to the Caribbean to South America.

An element of restraint — or is it a sense of decorum? — prevented Ms. Reeves from overtly showing off. "[Misty](#)," a vocal showpiece for Vaughan, had its luscious moments, but its juiciness was underplayed. The wounded essence of Holiday's "[God Bless the Child](#)" was transmuted into a sorrowful but clearheaded awareness of an unjust world in which "the strong gets more, while the weak ones fade."

Ms. Reeves sang the most narratively coherent rendition of Stevie Nicks's "Dreams" I have ever heard. Even in "Stormy Weather," a lament that tempts every singer to cry out to the heavens, Ms. Reeves kept the emotional temperature on simmer, preferring to treat this classic torch song as a sorrowful presentiment of lonely times ahead.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/17/arts/music/review-dianne-reeves-leads-journey-of-jazz-history-at-rose-hall.html>