

Hip Spin on Cocktail Jazz

Dave's True Story vocalist Kelly Flint didn't even like jazz, let alone sing it. But sing it she does.

by Dave Richards
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True story about **Dave's True Story**, a New York City jazz-pop quartet that plays smart, intoxicating tunes with a mellow feel and occasional dark undercurrent.

Guitarist Dave Cantor -- the Dave of Dave's True Story -- sought a female singer to complement his songs. Singer-songwriter Richard Julian suggested Kelly Flint, a singer with a sultry voice who grew up on pop music, not jazz.

She wasn't the least bit interested. She didn't even like jazz, let alone sing it. "I wasn't open to it," Flint conceded in a phone interview from New York. "Dave and I ended up getting drunk one night, and I ended up singing one of his songs. That's how I came to it -- through singing it, not from listening to it. I just sang one of his songs."

"You have to understand," added Cantor, "that the only vehicle for singing the songs prior to Kelly was me. And anyone who heard me sing my own songs knew that took away from them."

Dave's True Story puts a hip spin on cocktail jazz, making it fresh and modern, sort of a Blue Note band for the new millennium. While Flint grew up a Joni Mitchell fan -- and remembers Lulu's "To Sir with Love" knocking her out -- Cantor followed Steely Dan, Tom Waits, and Elvis Costello.

His ironic, smartly observed dispatches and narratives give Dave's True Story some meat, while the tunes go down easy as a cocktail.

"Steely Dan wrote very opaque lyrics, but towards the end, they began to do little dramatic narratives and that's what I latched onto," Cantor said. "In that sense, I'd say that's where their influence falls in."

The band includes Jeff Eyrich, who produced their CD, "Nature" and is Kelly's husband, on standup bass, and drummer Rich Zukor. They create percolating grooves, occasionally dabbling in bossa nova. Cantor also writes smooth, flowing melodies that have earned comparisons to Cole Porter and Burt Bacharach.

Tying it all together are Flint's seductive vocals, which can variously call to mind Peggy Lee, Sade, and Suzanne Vega. She's got it.

Dae Bennett, son of Tony Bennett, co-produced "Nature," one of three CDs they issued in 2005. The group also put out an album of "Nature" remixes titled "Project Remix," which adds trip-hop beats and techno flourishes to its alluring tunes.

In November, Dave's True Story issued "Simple Twist of Fate: DTS Does Dylan," which features their take on seven Bob Dylan songs. The group was asked to play an all-Dylan festival at a winery and cooked up a song list, not knowing that'd lead to a CD. "We were kind of nervous about it," Flint said. "Since they were intense Dylan fans, we thought maybe they wouldn't like what we were doing. But they ended up wanting to buy the CD. We thought, 'Oh, good idea!'"

They made one that includes "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," "I Want You," and "Simple Twist of Fate."

"My 3-year-old son has really good taste in music, and 'Fate' is his favorite song," Flint said. "So I had to do that one because of him."

Dave's True Story could get a boost later this year when "Trust the Man" -- a film with David Duchovny and Julianne Moore -- is released. They've got two songs in the movie. Earlier, they placed a few songs in "Kissing Jessica Stein."

For Saturday's show at Porters, Dave's True Story will draw on the Dylan record, "Nature," and old favorites such as "Sex Without Bodies." Should be loose and lively. "Audiences seem to think we're a lot of fun," Flint said. "We don't have a set show. We keep it very spontaneous. I don't think it's alive for the audience if it's not alive for us, so we keep it really fresh and it seems to work."