

Intrigue Magazine/Sunset Media



This month marks a little variation from the usual band review that is done for *Intrigue*. I had the pleasure recently to speak with Ann Sweeten, a critically acclaimed pianist, composer, producer and recording artist from Massachusetts.

Intrigue Magazine was forwarded a copy of Ann's latest recording, *A Place in the Sun*. Ann's recordings can be classified in the genre of New Age, or perhaps more appropriately, Neo Classical. For those of you who are familiar with this style of music, you are also familiar with Ann's music. Since Ann began recording in 1997, her name and music have become synonymous with the genre to the avid listener. In fact, her first CD, *Prism*, released in 1997 established her as one of the most promising new artists in her field.

Trained at the age of 6 on organ and soon after changing to the piano, Ann realized her love of the arts at an early age and began molding her career early on.

Each new CD showed progression in Ann's growth as a composer, arranger and performer. In fact, just five years after the release of her first album, Ann received her first of four consecutive Popular Artist Awards from ASCAP. In 2004, it appeared that Ann was on an unstoppable upward trend. In addition to the awards from ASCAP, two of her CD's enjoyed high placement on the charts, her album *Sapphire Days* was nominated for Best Neo-Classical Album & Best Cover Art and the song *Orange Band* from another of her CD's, *Passage*, was nominated Best New Age/World Song.

Note: Stop reading at this point, buy a copy of A Place in the Sun, listen to it once, then continue reading and re-listen to the recording!!!

What wasn't known to the rest of the world until the release of her most recent CD, *A Place in the Sun*, in February 2006 (debuting at #2 on the charts) was that Ann had just finished one of the most trying times in her life. For those that knew Ann through her music and insight of the liner notes in her CD's, Ann is a woman whose passion dictates her life... Her love and care of the environment, her devotion and dedication to her family, especially her dogs, and respect for all living creatures appear to frame her music.

On the day Ann was diagnosed with breast cancer, January 25, 2002. she began writing for *A Place in the Sun*, and more particularly, the song *Summer Tomorrows*. Obviously a horrific finding, Ann faced this personal challenge with a positive attitude, hearing from her doctors that the cancer had been found early on and she had an excellent prognosis. As many musicians do, Ann delved into her music with the emotions of the life experiences which translated into highly emotional compositions.

She proceeded with a lumpectomy where the biopsy from surgery had shown that the cancer had not spread. During this time, production on *Sapphire Days* was completed and subsequently released in November 2002. It immediately drew critical acclaim while her previous album *Reflections* hit #3 on the Charts. The public had no idea of what the rest of her life held at the moment. Still, Ann kept hoping and working.

While dealing with her own cancer, one of Ann's canine companions, Niko died in May 2002 of an untreatable cancer. The health of her last remaining dog of 16 years, Jessie, then began failing due to kidney disease. Ann now had a diversion from her own challenges and focused on caring for her beloved pet until Jessie's passing in January 2003. But, Ann's personal challenges had not ended. During the lumpectomy, one of her nerves had been injured leaving her with only partial mobility of her arm. Radiation could not begin until she could raise her arms above her head. Her range of motion was minimal and traditional therapy was not showing progress. Ann again turned within to her faith, hope and drive. She decided that to make it through this time, she needed to take matters into her own hands. Ann contacted the ballet studio where she had previously studied and rehearsed, seeking to return to utilize the strict disciplinary techniques of ballet to push her recovery. This worked and Ann was able to schedule and complete her radiation treatments. Subsequent tests showed that Ann is a cancer survivor. It was at this time that Ann finished writing for *A Place in the Sun*.

How does all this reflect in her music? For those of you unfamiliar with her recordings, they are instrumental. *A Place in the Sun* is a musical journey without lyrics from diagnoses and loss to treatment, recovery, survival, emancipation and excitement for the future. Amazingly, each piece has a counterpoint of hope, not despair. Do not expect gloomy minor progressions. The title of the CD is appropriate: even after the greatest of storms, eventually the Sun will shine and there is enough room for everyone to have their place.

If you have not already purchased a copy of this CD (and why not?), I would suggest getting one quickly. You can find more information on Ann Sweeten, purchase her music and find upcoming performance dates on her website at www.annsweeten.com.