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Biography of Dione Taylor

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A pastor's daughter from Regina Saskatchewan, **Dione Taylor** burst onto the music scene in 2004 with her debut album ***Open Your Eyes*** and performances for both the President of the United States and the Queen of England. The past year's remarkable career trajectory is one that **Dione Taylor** has traveled with grace, determination and true talent. No wonder this young jazz vocalist is now being hailed as an incandescent rising star on the Canadian musical firmament.

Dione Taylor's 2004 debut recording, ***Open Your Eyes*** (Matay Records), did exactly that for the Canadian jazz community. Sensing the arrival of a true artist in their midst, they responded quickly and positively. The album earned nominations at the 2005 Juno Awards, the Canadian Urban Music Awards, the Canadian National Jazz Awards and was named one of the Top Recordings of 2004 by Canada's Premier Jazz Station, Jazz. FM 91.1. That station placed three tracks from ***Open Your Eyes*** in regular rotation, and the album received a virtually unanimous thumbs-up verdict from music critics. Impressive airplay in Europe, Asia and the U.S. has helped the disc find its way into the homes and hearts of music lovers around the globe as well.

Dione acknowledges that the success of the album "did exceed my expectations. I had no idea so many people would react so enthusiastically to it." Response to the record certainly did not surprise any observers who had previously encountered **Ms. Taylor's** blossoming musical talent.

One such admirer is jazz legend, educator and recipient of the **NEA Jazz Masters Award**, Dr. Billy Taylor (no relation). He describes **Dione** as "Truly a gifted singer. Her genuine heartfelt presence creates a warm and intimate mood with which she interprets songs from the great American songbook".

Music has always been an integral part of **Ms. Taylor's** life. She was born and raised in Regina, in a family she describes as "really connected to the gift of song. My whole family sings in church and plays instruments and they are all great singers." She began playing the organ at age four and at the tender age of ten, she became music director and organist at The Shiloh Assembly Church (Apostolic) in Regina. At twelve, she commenced vocal and piano lessons at the Royal Conservatory of Music, receiving two Voice Scholarships upon high school graduation. She then attended the University of Regina, majoring in Voice (Classical and Opera).



A new love affair with jazz took full flight while **Dione** was in high school. "I had great teachers there who introduced me to jazz," she recalls. "It sounded so different from classical or gospel, and I wanted to learn more about it. It felt spiritual in its own way, and I really connected to it." **Taylor** began performing in local jazz clubs and festivals, prior to relocating to Toronto in 1996. A career turning point came when **Ms. Taylor** enrolled at the world-renowned jazz program at the Humber College of Applied Arts and Technology. Dione excelled academically and received the college's Thomas Kehoe Memorial Award for Outstanding Vocal Performance, graduating with honors from the program in 2003. While completing those studies, she entered an international competition for jazz students. She was selected as one of six jazz musicians from around the globe for the "Jazz and the New Generation" program. Led by Dr. Billy Taylor, it was sponsored by The Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., and its winners performed at a prestigious concert on the Millennium Stage.

Key to her success in the competition was Dione's dedication to musical diversity, and that has become one of her creative trademarks. "Diversity and the flexibility to do different styles is so important," she stresses. "You can work so much more and reach so many more people when you can speak different musical languages and put it all together into one story." Her eclecticism is shown when Dione cites as inspirations and influences such varied singers as Aretha Franklin, Sarah Vaughan, opera diva Leontyne Price and smooth-voiced jazzman Johnny Hartman.

While unmistakably a jazz album, *Open Your Eyes* reflects Ms. Taylor's love for and background in the blues, gospel and R 'n' B genres. Her rich and resonant voice has a truly soulful quality, one attractively complemented by her keenly trained musical intellect. This combination of soulfulness and subtlety is an irresistible one.

Dione's musical open-mindedness is reflected in the album's song selections. Jazz standards such as "**These Foolish Things**," "**I Fall In Love Too Easily**," "**I've Got The World On A String**," and the Gershwins' "**But Not For Me**" are all treated with delicacy and respect, yet breathe with fresh life via her vocal virtuosity. They nestle comfortably alongside less conventional choices from the pop realm. The Eurythmics' classic "**Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)**," Stevie Wonder's "**Send One Your Love**," and Freddie Mercury's "**Love Of My Life**" are all given a refreshing jazz-inflected makeover. Rounding out the album are four strong original tunes that demonstrate **Dione's** prowess as a songwriter. Rather than simply reinterpreting material in the jazz canon, she is determined to add to that body of work. The inclusion of "**Rollercoaster Man**" on the recent *Real Divas 2* compilation on 7Arts confirms her compositional ability. "I have been doing a lot of writing and soul-searching," she explains. "The best way to be different and express yourself is to write your own songs."

The already eagerly awaited second Dione Taylor album is in production in Toronto. Dione is thrilled at the presence of the legendary Doug Riley ("Dr. Music") as co-producer this time around. Such notable guests as Benny Green, Jane Bunnett, Pat LaBarbera and Jake Langley have been confirmed.

Ms. Taylor notes: "**One of my goals is to preserve and uphold the tradition of jazz and that means going back to the roots... which is the blues**".

With presidents, royals, musical peers and critics all on her side, there will clearly be no stopping **Dione Taylor**. Watching and listening to the career evolution of this exciting young artist promises to be a thrilling experience in the years ahead.



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