

## **PETITE SIRAHs AND ALL THAT JAZZ**

BY CLARK SMITH

What serendipity. Jo Diaz had cooked up on her own an idea about pairing the jazz piano and bluesy vocals of Alacia Van with a pile of Petite Sirahs, and invited me along without any notion of the work I've done on the subject. It was her notion that we could pair each of the 15 wines with a different selection.

I told her this wasn't likely to work. Either we would see no good pairings at all, or there would be groups of emotional modalities which would cluster around one song or another.

Wine is indeed liquid music. Harmony is critical to enjoyment, and each wine carries an emotional modality, just as does every musical piece. You can find wines that are cheerful, melancholy, romantic, angry and even sometimes share the intellectual curiosity of improvisational jazz. As Don Blackburn started talking about decades ago, pairing wines with a similar modality in music greatly enhances their appeal, and conversely, mismatching the two --trying to drink Cabernet around polka, for instance -- creates harshness and dissonance.

For many years, I've posted on my website suggested playlists for my own wines. More challenging is to find "inclusive" pieces that capture a winery's philosophy and work with everything they make. For me, Gershwin, Samuel Barber, and much flamenco guitar seems to work pretty well.

Although I've made a lot of Petite Sirahs with clients, I haven't marketed one myself since I started working with wine/music pairings, and I don't have a PS playlist. I was guessing that maybe what works

with Cabernet Sauvignon would transfer over. Cab likes the dark, angry stuff – Beethoven's 5th and 7th, Carmina Burana, Iron Maiden and the Doors. I wouldn't have said that sultry torchy 40's jazz piano would likely work.

Fortunately, it turns out I was wrong about this. PS has some bright, grapefruity aromatic notes (probably from its Pelousin parent) that invite a very different mood.

In the room, it turned out that some of the pieces worked very well indeed, owing to the sophistication and user-friendliness that has emerged from a lot of good winemakers working with this varietal mainly for the love of it, and it shows. Tasting before hand, I urged everyone to try to include in their notes a word or two about the wine's personality, its emotional modality, what kind of music it was taken as a whole. These were very useful in pairing with Ms Van's sultry "PS, I Love You," the spicy "Fever!", the sophisticated "La Vie en Rose," and the steamy "I Feel So Smoochie."

I didn't have time to exhaust the possibilities, but I made a pretty good stab, and I recommend latching on to Alicia's CD and/or anything else in your collection and popping the corks on three or four different PS styles from the list, to see for yourself if you like my pairings and what might work for you. When I didn't find a match, I've made suggestions you could try:

**Wine Personality Music match**  
Twisted Oak '08 Feminine, romantic  
Heart and Soul  
Miro '07 Affable American Tune  
(Paul Simon)?



Langtry '05 Heavy metal Fever  
Vina Robles Austere The Music That Makes  
Me Dance  
Diamond Ridge Vineyards '08 Salsa swing I  
Feel So Smoochie, Fever  
Concannon Livermore '07 Pathos PS I Love  
You  
Line 39 '07 Lyric, lean La Vie En Rose  
Ursa '05 Spicy, elegant Foxy Lady (Jimi  
Hendrix)?  
Silkwood '07 Macho soulful Fever  
Artezin '07 Mendocino Sultry, complex PS I  
Love You, Nearness of You  
EOS Estate '06 Bright, exotic Samuel Barber's  
Adagio for Strings?  
Parducci "True Grit" '06 Rock and Roll Fever  
Mettler '04 '80's Funk I Wish You Love  
Clayhouse '05 lyrical, Gershwin The Very  
Thought of You  
Pedroncelli '06 soft pop rock Hole in the World  
Tonight (Eagles)?  
Quixote '05 Complex, austere Carmina Burana  
(Carl Orff)?  
Lava Cap '05 sweet pop rock La Vie en Rose  
Artezin 07 Garzini Ranch epic Needs Opera  
Hess Collection Big, austere PS I Love You