

EAR CANDY FOR PETITE SIRAH

BY LAURA NESS

What music best matches the vibe of Petite Sirah? What an intriguing question. Music definitely influences mood: it carries an inherent sense of time that bonds



us together: we live to remember, to share and share again. It's part of the ritual of being human. Thanks to Jo Diaz for creating the forum for a handful of wine writers, including Dan Berger, Steve Heimhoff, Ken Payton, Clark Smith and myself, to share a compendium of Petites, 19 in all, brown-bagged, on a winter day at Hess Collection on Napa. Her idea was to pair each of them with cuts on this intriguing jazzy CD by Alacia Van. Crazy? Maybe. Fun? Absolutely. Definitive? Nope. Enlightening? Totally.

What music best matches the vibe of Petite Sirah? Short answer: it depends on the Petite. If they're massively dense and tannic, you'll want a heavier sound, like March Slave, Pearl Jam or Beethoven's 9th. If the Petite leans towards vibrant, effusive and cheery, maybe something more like Amy Grant or Faith Hill. Got a sexy, flirty, saucy Petite? Jazz works, anything from Coltrane to Diana Krall.



Music certainly influences mood: I know from experience in tasting rooms that if you play Eagles or Cream, people will engage in a way that boring, bland elevator music can never engender. Music carries an inherent sense of time that bonds us together: we live to remember, to share and share again. It's part of the ritual of being human.

Definitely endorphin-producing, recalling that first listening encounter of a loved band or artist brings a flood of memories. It's the foundation upon which new positive mileposts are engraved in the psyche, accentuated by the communal tasting of wine in a place made more memorable because of familiarity. To associate a favorite piece of music with a certain wine is to create an indelible impression, like a scratch on the vinyl part of your brain.

The jazzy CD we were "tasting" along with 19 black beauties, clearly called for wines that were "sexy," "sultry," and in some cases, soulful. We decided to cut to the chase and focus on four cuts. For the first selection, "I Feel So Smoochie," my choices were the 2007 Twisted Oak from Calaveras, and the 2007 Clayhouse from Paso. Both had bright citrus and strawberry notes that had a liveliness and light heartedness to them that accentuated the spirit of the song. These two had swing, baby!

"He's Funny That Way," a more pensive and soft sitting on the couch with lots of pillows jazz tune, cozies up to the 2006 Vina Robles Jardine from Paso, a soft, mellow incense-laden beauty, oozing of blackberries and blueberries, and big black cherries. This is music that plumps the pillows.

We all grooved to "P.S. I Love You," the tune that galvanized the tasting: my



heartthrob fave was the 2007 Artezini Garzini Ranch (Mendocino). It exhibited everything I adore about Petite. Clark Smith, Dan Berger and I seemed to come back to this one over and over, enjoying the way it caressed the palate without flogging it into purple submission.

I love Dan Berger: he insisted on pairing with "La Vie En Rose," the rendition of which was not quite his cup of mystery wine, which is his favorite thing, but nonetheless we were all pretty keen on the 2007 Line 39, a vivaciously flirty beauty from Lake County (\$10!!), as well as the 2007 Lava Cap, a spicy, smooth, sexy and lingerie-lingering temptress that does El Dorado proud.

Additional standouts were the 2005 Quixote, Napa, brought by winemaker Matt Reid, which would be great paired with a Mozart piano concerto; the 2007 Concannon "Conservancy," a solid performance from Livermore Valley, which would cozy up to melodies mellow and soothing; and the 2005 Diamond Ridge from Lake County (made by Clark Smith), which made me want to kick back on my deck with Bob Dylan's "Tangled up in Blue" crackling through the speakers. This was an impressive concert of Petites. Not too many out of tune instruments in the entire batch.

In the end, the process of listening to the wine with our brains and our ears, as well as with our palates, helped forge new bonds and strengthen old ones. We will never forget the experience of 19 beautiful Petite Sirahs, set to the incomparable music of camaraderie and friendship, and the deep appreciation of the artistry and passion that went into each of them.

What music goes best with Petite? The music that ice cream and blueberry pie or dark bitter chocolate cake share when they melt, one into the other. A music you can taste, all the way to your inner ear, where you can relive that unique sensory ear candy experience for many years to come.