

WOMEN IN JAZZ MEDIA

THE MAGAZINE



Allegra Levy
Ashley Jackson
Bea Asurmendi
Betty Accorsi
China Moses
Enid Farber
Fiona Mactaggart
Germana Stella La Sorsa
Isabel Marquez
J Steps
Kim Cypher
Kimberly M Wang
Lakecia Benjamin
Marianne McGregor
Melorie Jane
Monika S Jakubowska
Paulette Jackson
Romy Summers
Shireen Fisher
Tatiana Gorilovsky
Thembi Dunjana
Veronica Swift

and so much more!

JULY
2025

COVER PHOTO: LAKECIA BENJAMIN
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We are always grateful to our many partners that support our work and would like to give special thanks to our guest contributors for this edition:

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Lorraine Feather
The Ostara Project
Jamie Shew
Renegade Queens

Welcome to the latest edition of our Women in Jazz Media magazine.

As always, we welcome you all to a magazine full of incredible voices. Having a voice should not be a privilege. Being heard should not be a privilege. Being valued and respected, should not be a privilege. However, across the world, many people are not heard; they are not seen.

It is vital that these voices are given a platform to be heard, a community where those voices can feel safe, valued and supported. It is my honour to present stories, experiences, pain and joy through imagery, music, words and support from the contributors in this edition.

This is an interactive magazine, so please do click away to visit websites, buy music, watch videos etc, or you can download as a pdf. Please take your time. Take a moment away from your phone and enjoy the photography on a larger screen. Please share the incredible artists you see here with your communities. Together we can support each other, we can inspire each other, and we can enjoy art, in all forms, together.

Fiona Ross,
Founder

Photo of Amy Gadiaga by Tatiana Gorilovsky



LAKECIA BENJAMIN

Photos by Elizabeth Letizell

Photos by Elizabeth Letizell



LAKECIA BENJAMIN

SURVIVOR SOVEREIGN STORYTELLER

Saxophonist, arranger, composer, and educator. Five times Grammy nominee. Her portfolio includes working with Clark Terry, Terri Lyne Carrington, Gregory Porter, Theo Croker, Robert Glasper, Missy Elliott and Alicia Keys, Anita Baker, Stevie Wonder. Her albums have included legends such as Brandee Younger, Regina Carter, Me'Shell NdegéOcello, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Jazzmeia Horn, Zakiyyah Modeste, Wayne Shorter and Angela Davis.

Since her debut album *Retox* in 2012, Lakecia Benjamin has relentlessly pursued – and achieved – excellence. Growing up in a Dominican neighbourhood in Washington Heights, Manhattan, Lakecia was surrounded by high energy fuelled Latin music and community strength and an undeniable capacity to strive for excellence. It is these components, along with a deep respect for legacy and continually moving forward that are embedded into everything she does, that has allowed us to see the inspiring evolution of the outstanding artist she has become.

Her new single *Noble Rise*, released on June 27th is described as ‘a riveting introduction to Benjamin’s new chapter.’ Benjamin herself has said the single is “stepping into a season that honors every side of who I am: the survivor, the sovereign, the storyteller.”

THE SURVIVOR

I would like to explore why the world ‘survivor’ is so important to reference when speaking about your new single. The horrific car accident and subsequent healing obviously had a profound impact on you, and you explored this in *Phoenix*, but can you talk me through why *Noble Rise* is referencing Lakecia Benjamin survivor?

Yes, my past two albums Phoenix and Phoenix Reimagined, explored that kind of theme. When people spoke about those albums, they talked about the struggle of coming back from such a horrific thing and how for different people in different industries, different fields, you must be resilient. I wanted to acknowledge that and while I do believe some people refer to survivors as people that overcame something, and I also believe you kind of develop a new identity. It's almost like a burn. Once you get burned, you heal from it, but it's still there. I see it as this part of who I am for the rest of my life. This is part of my story. So, I don't want to alienate where I've come from because that is the foundation of what's happening. I wanted to honour that. While we're still moving forward and wanting to get away from Phoenix, it is still part of the core and soul of who I am.

The legacy of the musicians and the music that came before you is also relevant here, you are not only paying homage to the legends before you, but moving their legacy forward within your own music. So, would you say that survivor reference is also a reference to the legacy of the music that has survived and that is still here and still relevant?

Yes, absolutely. I feel that sometimes we spend a lot of time trying to push forward and thinking about what's next, what's new, who I am, what am I becoming? But that's current, you don't have to try so hard. Anything I release is part of that tale. But it's sometimes hard for a listener or an audience member to really understand how musicians and how our culture in our field works. In sports, there's somebody that comes before you, they teach you, they move on. But in our genre, luckily – and because you don't really age in the same way - we're lucky to have 81-year-olds, 90 year olds still playing with us, redefining the music in real time. And the younger audience has a chance to highlight them and still show that this is still happening, while we still have a George Clinton for example, still functioning and going strong. I think it's crucial to not forget the ones that are still here, because they are still on the battlefield as well.

That’s one of the many things that you do so beautifully, bringing some of those stories and experiences to a new audience. You’ve worked with some incredible legends and I’m still completely overwhelmed that you worked with Angela Davis! Thinking about those new audiences, sadly, I suspect there are many people who don’t know who Angela Davis is, and it is so inspiring that you are using your platform to share the history and the legacy that went before us all.

Fortunately, we live on a big planet and there’s a lot of people all over the world, different languages, different ages, different circumstances... There’s someone out there who doesn’t know who LeBron James is! So, yes, any opportunity you have, you must share, because the unfortunate thing is that times are constantly repeating themselves. Angela Davis in 1965 was there, she was important and unfortunately, in 2025, those same issues have reap-

peared. I think it’s important to highlight people that are still doing what they do at a high level and that still care. They still have boots to the ground because it’s so easy to just numb yourself in a way, for the sake of surviving.

I must ask - what was it like working with Angela Davis? She is such an inspiration to so many, me included.

People don’t know this about me but, at my senior recital in college, I didn’t even put a picture of myself up, I uploaded a picture of Angela Davis. I always think that musicians that have come and gone or that are still here are crucial. But I really believe in combining the art forms, when you can. Sometimes you don’t get a chance to include authors, dancers, photographers in your music. Angela has a way with her speech, something in her that is almost like Malcolm X. You know the voice when you hear it. It was like a dream come true. Everyone I work with is like that. But there are certain key people. You just step back and think, oh my gosh, you know?

You have worked with an incredible range of artists almost right from the beginning of your career. I imagine it was initially overwhelming, but the inspiration and the growth you must have received from working with Terri Lyne Carrington, Dee Dee Bridgewater, China Moses, all these incredible artists, can only be incredible. Obviously, I am highlighting women, but there’s men too of course. How does that make you feel? The experience and the work that you’ve had with these incredible musicians.

Honestly, I don’t think it’s been processed and it’s hard to process when you’re putting out work constantly. But you are the person that must hunt them down. Spear like. But if I hadn’t, I would never have had these opportunities. I think it does speak volumes to not only be seeking people out and luckily getting their mentorship, but when you look back to realise that it was your hard work that allowed you to take those steps to grow. While it is inspirational for me, I think for someone else coming up it can also show them not a blueprint exactly, but they can also say, maybe I’m not having a great career right now and nobody wants to work with me, but maybe I need to



get my feet to the ground and seek people out.

It is clear to everyone how hardworking and resilient you are, but that hustle, that constant, relentless hustle and the quality of the work that you're producing must be exhausting. There's an element of survivor instinct in there as well, surely? You must be exhausted; do you ever take a moment?

Yes, I do think it's exhausting. It does take a certain personality. It may even take a certain upbringing. No, I don't take those moments to breathe and I believe that a lot of musicians who do get moments are because they're not working, or because things are not going so well. It's a weird field because it rains, pours or it's a drought. I'm still at the time in my life when I'm trying to figure out how to manage that. I was on a panel with Patrice Rushen and Dee Dee Bridgewater recently, and they were talking about how they don't talk to people after their shows and before their shows. They meditate and get to this elite state. And then afterwards, they come back and have moments of peace and they ask, how do you do it, Lakecia? And I said, nothing like what you're talking about! Maybe, it's a status thing. I'm sure Beyoncé doesn't have to say hi to anybody after the concert. But for me, my brand, I do want to meet people. They'll come and keep me talking for 15 minutes about how exhausting the show looks, but they're still talking to me for 15 minutes. Yes, I am exhausted because the show was exhausting, but I should be exhausted.

I've seen your performances, heard your music. I mean the energy is palpable and just talking to you, I can feel your energy. You are clearly an energetic person, both mentally and physically as well. Is that something that you have to think about, prepare for, or is that just who you are?

You know, some people are born with a lot of athletic ability. But I don't care who you are, how much energy you have, how wonderful life goes for you, you must take care of your body and your mind or you will have some kind of serious breakdown. I do think I am naturally like that but there is a cut-off point and you have to try to find some type of balance and build those muscles. If you're jumping on the stage, you better workout, you better eat right, sacrifices come from somewhere. We all have gas in our car, but we have brakes too.

I'm sensing you don't put your foot on the brakes that often...

I have certain ways and I try to find a balance between what's going on. But the more prominent you get, the more pressure, but also the

more educated conversations we're having about those breaks. I can tell you that music really hits somebody after the show. All common sense has gone. The audience just wants to be close. They just want to touch. They just want a bit of light and they would like to take it, you know? I guess it's something I've told other people I'm still working on, still figuring out, because I don't want to ever come across as ungrateful, always humble, of course. And so that's my struggle and it's something I'm still balancing and trying to figure out.

THE SOVEREIGN

Exploring your new song Noble Rise you have said that this is a more regal era. Can we talk about your use of the word sovereign?

Yes! My music, my look, what I'm channelling, I like my music to be a little prestigious. When we think of the old days of nobility, you think about the worst people in the world conquering everything. But I try to bring it to a place where people can see the nobility in themselves and the light they wish themselves to be. When you watch Wonder Woman or Superman, you see those powers and they have everything but they're always using it for good. They're always rising to the occasion, and they're always doing it with grace. They're doing it in humility, and they're doing it while looking outstanding. So, when I think of myself, I try to always be outstanding, always be leading in grace and be humble in what I'm doing. But it does take sacrifice to be excellent. I think we need to be in a place where you can be beautiful and graceful, beautiful and elegant. You can be beautiful, and command respect but the way that is going around now to me, it's a little tacky...

You are a role model to so many people, but especially for young saxophonists, young musicians, young women, young black women – does that ever put any pressure on you? Is it in your mind that people are looking up to you?



Yes, of course it's in my mind, but it doesn't feel like pressure. I know that however hard I work, if I don't achieve something, I tried my best. I know that if I broke some kind of boundary or broke a record or something, I've opened the door for somebody else to go through. My goal is always to crack the door so that people can run in. I must be real with the limitations of what I have and what I'm trying to achieve. I don't feel the pressure, but I feel that it's important to show people.

A lot of the gigs in America have a cultural element and we have to speak to the kids, teach them something or play with them, meet and greet etc. And consistently I had to go to these things and people kept saying 'Oh my God, the Grammys, the Grammys...'. I was very excited about those Grammys nominations, but at the time I was pretty let down. I was just honest with the children. I think it's important that they can actually see somebody that reached a level that they are dying to get to - the Grammys - and they're asking me because of my story, how does it feel to go from the bottom and survive and move up? Yes, I moved up and I know it doesn't feel like it to you but I feel like I'm at the bottom. Because now I have to start again, trying to get something again because I've been let down in some way. I think it's important that you see me at this place. I was honest about how I was feeling and how hard it's going to be for me to go from here to the next album now. Being open teaches young people in our field. You can teach people not to just keep aiming for the top, but how to handle rejection. That's the kind of role model I'm trying to be. It's painful for you, but it's helpful for someone. This is the story of my life.

THE STORYTELLER

You show people what is possible with hard work, with resilience and of course, your incredible ability and that's incredibly inspiring. That does lead us beautifully on to you as a storyteller. There are so many experiences that you've gone through, some of which we have explored, but they obviously shape everything you do and shape your music, but in reference to your use of the word 'storyteller' in describing Noble Rise, how does the storyteller element appear?

I don't do anything that doesn't have a story to it. That is how I am. Since the Coltrane album, I decided that what I'm going to do is to actually document my story so that whenever I go, someone could look back and say this is mostly what has been happening, because otherwise you're just guessing and piecing things together. I think these past couple years have been for me, well, I can't even believe I'm standing here able to talk... Now I have to turn my head on all of that and look at it like it never happened and look forward in order to move forward. A good way to at least - I don't want to say clean the pallet, to, you know, add the ginger to the sushi - but a lot of my work does involve the elders and that is the direction I am going in still for the next album. I do feel that alto saxophone really doesn't get the credit it deserves. It feels like a tenor sax world. A trumpet world. And I've always been really inspired by Immanuel and what he's able to do.

Saxophonist and composer Immanuel Wilkins, joins Lakecia on the new single 'Noble Rise'. Immanuel released his third album *Blue Bloods* on the Blue Note label last year and their partnership has been described as 'a meeting of minds'

The recognition he was able to get so early on, you know? When people think about alto sax, at least coming out of America, we're the two that they think of. The chances of us working together? Probably none, we play the same instrument. But I thought it would be great and we play with such different energy, coming from different places. Right now, we're both touring, we're hitting all the main festivals, all the blogs are talking about us, all the polls are talking about us ...I thought it would be a good way to do something that's fun for me but that still shows the legacy from a youngers perspective and to give it a refresh. Let's have a nice refresh of what is happening from working with all these legends. Look what's happened. Look at what music is doing right now and how wonderful it is before we move on. I see Immanuel all the time and I wanted to play with him. I wrote this song for him. Musically it's so different from Phoenix and I thought it would move us forwards, clean everything up. So when I come out with the new album, we are gently bringing people out of Phoenix.



People really don't want to leave Phoenix, so I said Ok, Phoenix Reimagined but, I know my audience, and I need to gradually walk you out of this room. So, it's taking two years, but I'm going to walk you out. So much better things in the lobby.

Wherever Lakecia Benjamin is, there is greatness.

[Click here for Lakecia's website](#)



CHINA MOSES



Photos by Alexandre Lacombe



CHINA MOSES

SINGING, SAVOURING AND DEFENDING ARTISTIC FREEDOM: PART 2

Since our last magazine, when we published part one of our interview with China Moses, China has been taking audiences around the world on an incredible ride. Her 'It's OK Tour' 'It's not a tour... it's a lifestyle' began in March – and is still going strong – and audiences have been gifted with her incredible artistry all over the globe. Of course that is not all she has been doing. Stunning performances including the SELMER Music Festival anniversary celebration, her radio shows and always, always, always finding time to support and celebrate the community. As I said in our first interview: Her voice, her artistry, her humanity are important. She changes lives. She empowers.

[YOU CAN READ PART ONE HERE](#)

China's upcoming album 'It's Complicated', set for release in October 3rd is a masterclass in empowerment, honesty and excellence. The pre-launch event held in June, which included a guest appearance by Dee Dee Bridgewater, demonstrated, in abundance, China's artistry. Her ability to connect with people. Her exceptional performance skills. Her joy. Her soul. This is an artist in her prime.

China's previous release *This One's For Dinah*, a celebration of Dinah Washington, gifted us with stunning performances of classics such as *Mad About The Boy*, *Cry Me a River* and *Blue Gardenia*. Her recent performance at Mississippi Goddam: A Celebration of Nina Simone in London, saw her speak to the anger and frustration that surrounded Simone's life. *It's Complicated* is an album that returns to China Moses, the songwriter.

It's an obvious question, but we've never really talked about it and I would really love to know: what is your writing process like?

*It's important for people to understand how somebody who doesn't play an instrument can compose. My creative process comes in spurts and I'm always on it. A lot of bits and pieces on the album were created in different moments. Ideas of songs came along at different moments. Most of the time I record informal voice memos. That's how I compose. I sing all parts - basslines, harmonies, string harmonies etc. Whatever I'm feeling, I reference it all orally. So, a song like 'My Part of Town' is a song that was actually leftover from my *Nightingale* Album. I didn't put it on that album because sonically we felt it didn't fit. *Nightingales* was already very wide sonically from the rhythms that we were proposing. From funk to R'n'B to swing and that particular riff music which is something that I love most in the world. I am a riff music based artist. When I met with Troy Miller, in the first initial conversation, I played him 'My Part of Town'. He looked at me, he said, what is this? I was like, it's just the song I've been carrying around in my personal repertoire. Troy looked at me and said, that's the sound. That's the sound of the album. That's where we're starting from and this is when he told me he really wanted to do this album with me. After that I went back to Oli Rockberger who helped me finish off my ideas. All these songs are my compositions. Except 'Nowhere to hide', which is fully Oli's. It is an album that everyone around me insisted that needed to fully stem from me. Oli became that very quiet, encouraging confidant*

- he is really good at doing that. I just let him sit with all these demos, all these ideas, all these little trinkets and he pieced it together. The album is made from the ideas that resonated the most with Oli and the ones that I wasn't letting go of.

Such an incredible team involved with the album - Oli Rockberger, Troy Miller, Theo Croker, Lakecia Benjamin, Marvin Sewell, Daru Jones and more. The musicianship and production is staggering. The title It's Complicated, how did that come into being?

There wasn't a concept, but there was clearly a sound by the musicians that Troy and I gathered in the studio, to translate the piano voice tunes that Oli and I had done. And once it started gelling and forming in the three-day recording period of the record, I looked over to Theo, and Lakecia was there too. We're just listening, and I remember telling them I don't know if this is jazz, R&B, I don't know what this is, it's complicated for me to describe what my music is. I guess I'll just hand it over to people and say, listen to this and you'll figure it out, but it's really complicated. I'm going from dating on apps to mass shootings, to loneliness. Drastic left and right turns. It just jumps, and it really is just complicated! A day can be filled with different emotions - the more we're connected to our phones, the more we know what's going on in the world, the more we get the breaking news updates. And then you hear a girlfriend call you and say something funny, and then you go back to your phone and then you feel like the world is crumbling. Then your nephew calls and he's done good in his math test. It's just the day is wild in everybody's life. And so, it just started being this word that I kept on saying.

It really is complicated.

You had a fantastic pre-launch event in June and the album comes out in October, but you are already touring some of this incredible music. Your live performances are always outstanding and cover the whole spectrum of emotions and clearly with intent. How do you hope the audience feels after one of your gigs?

That they don't regret spending the money that they spent on buying the ticket. That they had a good time. I just really hope that they have a good time and that maybe for the two hours they spent in my company, that they forgot their long list of things to do - bills that weren't paid, whatever pain they were going through that day. I hope that they were drawn into the musicianship. I hope they say that my musicians are killing or that a particular song got to them. I really hope for people to say that they love the experience and don't feel that whatever they paid for that ticket was too much. You're taking a gamble when you're going to see somebody. You're putting a lot of trust in them and putting this amount of money down for you to entertain me. That's the contract. It's a trust contract. So that's what I hope they say that they just had a good time. That's the only thing. If your name is always associated with something and that's a good time, well as an artist, that's amazing no matter what type of art. You know that you made them feel something. That's all I can hope for.

The connection you have with audiences is something very powerful. And I must reference your Mum here too. I saw her perform recently and I was an emotional wreck afterwards, in the best possible way. The range of emotions that she drew us in with and connected us with was astounding, it's one of her superpowers and one that you also have.

Once again, it comes back to the art of performing for me. It's not something to be neglected, it's not something to be under thought, it's not an afterthought. It's an intention. Before going on stage, I always think about those who died before me for me to be able to do what I do. I also think of the people who wish they could. There's still places on Earth where a woman can't get up on stage and say the things I say. So yes, I think of that often and it's not something you take lightly. I'm serious about my joy. That's where the severity of my thought is. I don't think I have to do 'serious music', even though some music I do will be considered very serious because it's social music, socially conscious music. But there's a message and I do not have a problem taking a stand. But I also don't take the joy for granted. Being able to have a voice, my goodness. What a responsibility. So, what I choose to do with it is thought out.

Your voice is powerful, on so many levels. You recently spoke out publicly about not being paid for some gigs. This was a significant moment of empowerment for the whole community and the response and support you received was incredible. It lifted us all. I speak to people all the time behind the scenes about issues that need to be addressed but there is a huge fear. A fear of not getting booked for gigs anymore, a fear of – and especially as a woman – being labelled 'difficult'. Some people just say 'it's just the way it is'. But with these barriers and no action, there will be no change. What do you say to women who feel hesitant to speak out because they're afraid of the consequences?

I had been very quiet and very gracious about it. But there's power in numbers and I think especially for small music communities you need to make sure you're not the only one. The backlash is tough to deal with and it's a natural fear to have because stepping out is a lonely space to be in. Where do you draw the line in how you are being treated? That's the question that everybody has to ask themselves, where they draw the line. And my line might not be the same as somebody else's line. Somebody may have drawn the line earlier. Some people draw the line and don't cross it. I've drawn the line plenty of times but never decided to cross over to the other side. And now that I have, I don't see how I could go back. But it's also asking for accountability from others. You have to be strong on your own self accountability. That's why I wrote the song,. It's OK. It is a song about self-accountability.

'CAUSE ALL THE LIES I TOLD
THEY WEIGH HEAVY
THE SUM OF PAST MISTAKES
KEEPS ON RISING
ALL THE DREAMS I SOLD
STILL THEY HAUNT ME
BUT NOW I KNOW
NOW I KNOW
IT'S OK'

That's me drawing the line and finally taking a step past that threshold. It's just the hardest thing to do, self-accountability. The reason I permitted myself to do what I did was because I knew I had a black and white situation. He was wrong, I was right. There was no way you could turn it anywhere else. There was no way he could turn this to his advantage.

If you're going to take that action, know that the line that you draw is the line that you draw for yourself and once you take a step over that, you're going to have to be accountable for yourself also. Make sure you've answered those questions. Did you do everything possible? Sometimes you do have the losing hand and the world is not fair. There's been many times I haven't spoken up because I had the losing hand. There was no way I could pull it around. I know I was unfairly treated or not paid or been screwed around, but I didn't have the winning hand. Being a woman, and I said this when I did the Women in Jazz panel for the EFG London Jazz Festival, I said, as a woman we have to learn how to contort ourselves. Our life is contortion, bending and fitting into spaces that we're not supposed to be in. Being a woman business owner who runs her own business - I do not have management. I employ musicians. I employ a booking agent. If you look at all the relationships you have as an artist and switch it around, that accountability. No, my booking agent didn't do me wrong, I didn't keep on it. I also wasn't hard enough on them to make sure that they paid me. I was too trusting. Oh, the money's late. It happens. But how many times are you going to say 'it happens' before you get mad? If you draw the line, make sure that once you make that choice, you stand by that choice and really think about what you've done. Before you draw it, before you cross that threshold.

I'm imagining once you did that you must have felt so empowered? You certainly empowered the community. Everyone was so inspired.

You know what, it was funny. At first, I felt so loved because I was so supported, so many people reached out. But then I was horrified because so many people shared it, so many stories came out about what they were going through, what they had gone through. People were calling and reaching out to help, which was great. But at the same time, it was draining because I was telling the story over and over again, it was a lot. But the first moment I really felt empowered was when my mom cried and said 'You did something that I could never have done'. Because when she was having those problems, it was years ago. Times were different. She didn't have social media to go to. I took action in a way that she could never have taken. That was a big one and I hadn't thought about that. And then secondly, my stylist, he's very funny. He's used to people not paying him and dealing with that. He just sent me a voice note, laughing. It was just a laugh. And then at the end of the message, he just said, you showed him and he found out. I was drained emotionally and I'm feeling all these emotions because I did something that I was told not to do, that was going to break my career and everything. But you know what? He fucked around, got found out and I look cute doing it! In my yellow dress - this motherfucker's not paying me, but don't I look fly.

Oh yes.

It's Complicated is out October 3rd.

[Sign up here.](#)



VERONICA SWIFT



Photo by Matt Baker

FEED YOUR HEAD

“Where jazz meets rock....where Ella Fitzgerald meets Freddie Mercury...Veronica Swift is the bridge”...and the question is one and only one: why not?

GERMANA STELLA LA SORSA TALKS TO VERONICA SWIFT

One of the best phrases that I've come across is “when we overthink things, is where we start derailing” and it's an extract from a short YouTube video of American singer Veronica Swift.

Thanks to a powerful and direct voice, a dazzling improvising technique and an outstanding musicality, from a very young age Swift has affirmed herself as one of the most notable jazz singers of our time, winning second place in the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Vocals Competition in 2015 and releasing her acclaimed debut album “Confessions” with Mack Avenue Records four years later, followed by “This Bitter Earth” in 2021.

But her recognition, didn't stop her from colouring outside the lines of the somewhat restrictive – and very often overly intense – world of jazz vocals and jazz in general, to start a true revolution, without overthinking too much but with a specific strategy and plan.

Her principle is simple: life is just too short not to do what we love or to restrain our self-expression and I couldn't agree more with this.

The singer affirms her artistic freedom firstly talking about the concept of ‘transgenre’, to loosen herself from the familial duty to uphold the jazz roots and revealing in time what really has fuelled her creativity: rock and soul

music, among many others things.

With her third album, “Veronica Swift” released in 2023, she unravels her polyhedral-self, in an honest and intelligent testament to her versatility and bravery that includes, besides jazz, a multitude of genres and references from musical theatre, rock and opera.

Even her change of look is the bold and audacious expression of a woman that allows herself to be unapologetically creative, have fun and, on top of everything, - in a world that wants even more to confine female artists (and especially singers) in boxes of gowns and specific aesthetic standards - simply be who she is.

Swift will showcase her “transgenre” approach this summer in France, with a stop on August 9th, at Ronnie Scott's in London, bringing her exploration of French and Italian opera, European classical music, bossa nova, blues, rock, funk, and vaudeville.

But “transgenre” was just the first step in Swift's plan: with the brilliant cover of Queen's 1973 anthem “Keep Yourself Alive” and references to “The Show Must Go On”, the singer anticipated her next move: the introduction of DAME, her first rock band.

With this new project, she is starting a series of live performances in the US at the end of September and, as the big fan that I am, having followed her moves closely, I just can't wait to see what Swift has in store next.

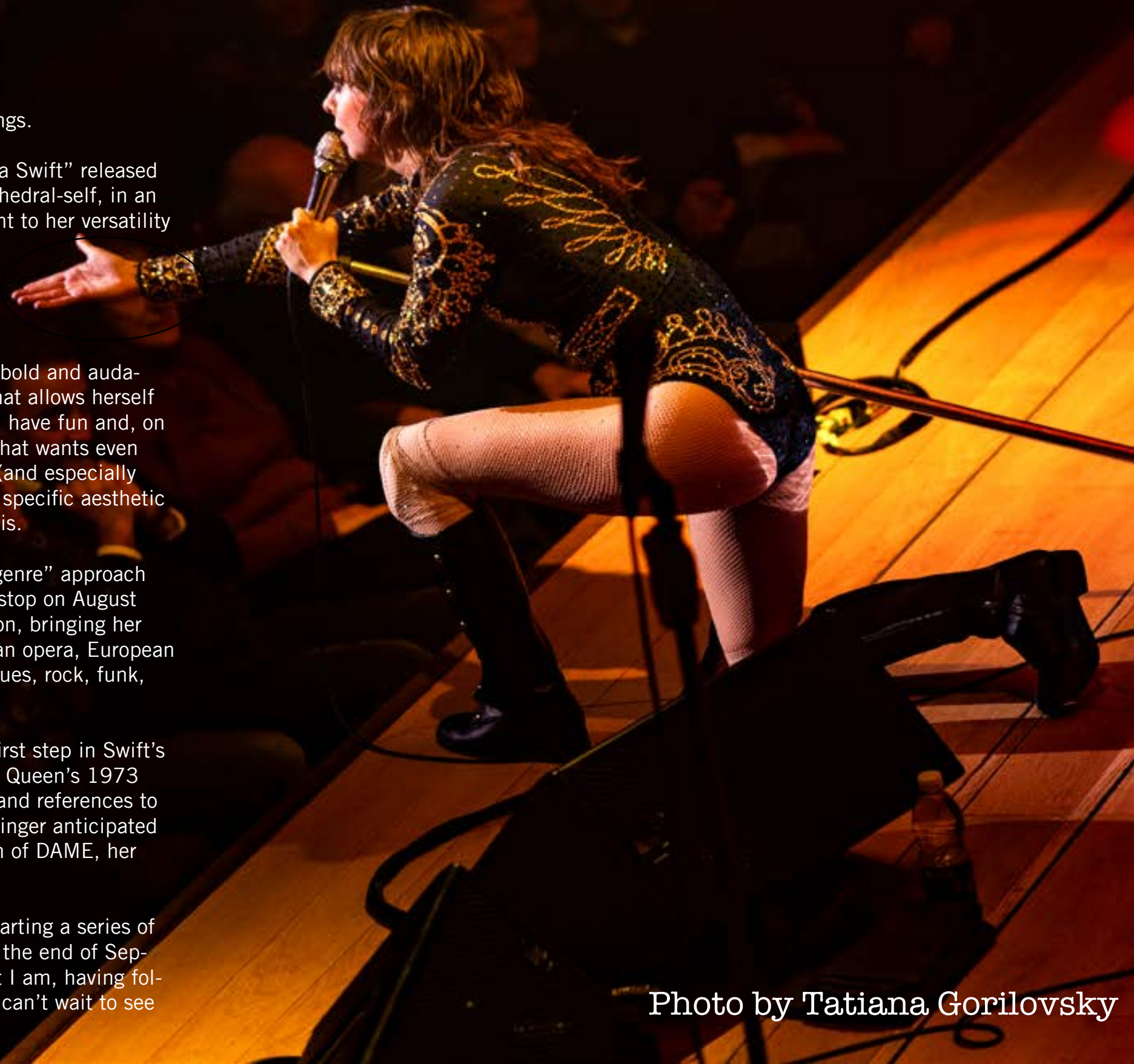


Photo by Tatiana Gorilovsky

Your evolution – from your first album to your new project. How would describe this journey? What have you learnt along the way?

Every time you make a record it feels like the first time because what you're doing is capturing a moment in time in your life as an artist, as a person.

When I was 9, that wasn't like I was getting ready to make my first record and it was not a serious career move. I started singing with my parents - who, for those who don't know, are both world renowned, famous jazz musicians - so I grew up in the business. A lot of people get into jazz through their families or through school.

I grew up on the road and jazz clubs, kind of like Liza and Judy - that's like me and mum, you know. But that was just something my mom wanted to capture...this young, emerging talent and artist at the beginning of their career, the beginning of their life and I wasn't trying to impress the world. There's something pure about that... and then there was the first record with Mack Avenue, which is “Confessions” and, even though there was another one as an adult, this was the first in my career with the “eyes are on me” kind of thing so there was a pressure that I had... a sort of 'Alright, I have this moment to tell my story and so many songs”.

When you're a kid, you're not thinking about career trajectory and the choices you make and how they can affect your future. As a creative, it's so important we are in that space of just being in the moment, that spontaneous moment that's captured. It's always important to be strategic, of course, but to put on those different hats at different times. What I wasn't doing was tending to the garden that was my creativity, which was rock'n'roll, punk, soul music... like P funk, the theatre, Broadway, the opera. All this huge plethora of other kinds of music and colours into my palette that when they started to weave their way into my jazz repertoire - especially in the last four years - it was a good way to test... So there was a strategic way that I wanted to test the audience because now I'm actually being my authentic full self to my fans and promoters and presenters. And then I came

out with the latest record, the self-titled, which was that broad genre album.

Now, that was an intentional choice to have it kind of be a million things, which for some people can be jarring...it can be like “what is this? I don't know what to make of this”, but you have to see the live show for it to make sense. Otherwise you can just listen to the record... like there's baroque funk jazz... it's just a whole melting pot....think of jambalaya or gumbo: it's just a million tastes all at once. I could have done the 180 degree flip where it's like “and now I'm going to rock” but to me what felt more genuine was to introduce it - also because it was a strategic choice - but because I I wanted to use when I call the “transgenre show”. This is my tipping my hat off to also the LGBTQ world that I am a part of, but really it's like the wide spectrum of musical styles and where you fit on that changes from day-to-day and your mood.

And is it why you decided to have two different Instagram profiles – one with Dame and one as Veronica Swift Jazz?

Yeah, that's where I was getting to... the ‘transgenre’ project was always a vehicle. Think about a ferry: there's one port, which is jazz and then there's the other port, which is rock and original. The way I write original music is very theatre driven, rock, opera driven. So how do I get from here to there? There needs to be a ferry that takes you... it doesn't ever stop, but the ferry is constantly taking you from dock to dock. So, once I identified as - actually after I got knighted in France in 2023 - where I came up with the Dame concept, you know, I think Joan of Arc, female Knights, the French Revolution, the American Revolution and revolution in general....and then Cabaret and Weimar Cabaret..I want to do that with my original project and it's going to be called Dame. We've been building towards, basically, this week, which is the 2 separate profiles of Veronica Swift - which a lot of presenters and promoters will be very happy to know - will be really firmly planted in jazz roots and then Dame will be the rock project, so it's clearly branded.

Tell me about your new project ‘Dame’ and ‘Transgenre’ can you tell me about what the word means to you and what you hope it means to an audience?

Dame is what I wanted to start, with 'transgenre', to show people. In a way, like when you want to get people into deep jazz: you don't just start with Coltrane and all the crazy modal stuff. You play some Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, Louis Armstrong and test their taste. So that was what I was doing with the 'transgenre'. I saw so many people in my audience just love the Queen stuff, they wanted more theatrical, strong female front-women singers.

That's what is really authentic to me so I said like “let's get to the point, let's put out the Dame stuff”. And the Dame stuff is just that: if anybody knows me as a person, doing jazz or doing Dame, it's the same thing essentially.

But the Dame stuff is very much like Queen, Led Zeppelin, Aerosmith, Beatles with the mix of musical theatre...so it's basically Jesus Christ Superstar, Les Mis and Cabaret put together. It's definitely not a band that can play in theatre performing arts centre that has a reverberant hall because it would be too loud and theatrical.

But, in the jazz projects with the Veronica Swift 's record coming out down the road we'll have a lot more of the trio setting, so best of both worlds.

You were mentioning Queen as well. I know that you got into their music at the age of thirteen/fourteen, watching Freddie Mercury's videos and getting inspired by him but you actually said that, compositionally, you feel closer to Brian May. What is your relationship with this band?



When I was younger - like eleven/ twelve - I started to get really heavily into classical music. I mean, I was around the jazz world but jazz was never a genre that I felt I needed to dive into and I didn't have that call... I grew up around it: it was just there.

But the classical music, then opera and Romantic and Baroque music, this was the music where I first felt kind of like filling my veins with. And then I would rent out scores from the music libraries and really get into score study so I had a firm, kind of sophisticated understanding of classical music and orchestration.

Then I started getting my mum to show me the rock music that was around when she was younger and, of course, when I found Queen it blew my mind: it's classical music with rock, all my favourite things in one place.

So I started to find that all my favourite songs by Queen were all Brian May songs. Freddie's too - they both come from a lot of love for classical music – but I could see a lot of similarities between the way Brian writes and the harmonic structure in the scores that I was studying. When I saw a man two generations above me with a band that was like thirty-forty years ago, coming from the same frame of reference I was, I felt like a kindred spirit with that and it was really cool.

Which ones are your favourite Brian May songs?

I have to separate songs and pieces with Queen 'cause there's more orchestral pieces and then there's songs. So for songs, I recorded “The show must go on” and “Keep yourself alive”, so definitely these but I also do love their kind of fantasy rock stuff like “White Queen”, the stuff on the “Queen I ” and “Queen II ” albums, even like the orchestral procession to the intro of the Queen II album. Just these are the kind of songs that tickle me in that way.

Artists continually - or should – grow and evolve but throughout history, jazz artists have come under fire/faced criticism from ‘the jazz police’ when they move into other genres or introduce non jazz influences into their work. Have you reached a stage in your career when this doesn’t bother you?

It was definitely a shock when I had assumed that my audience would have got me, to a certain extent. I will say that this percentage of people who were maybe not so into it was a very small percentage and what we gained versus what we’ve lost was just this huge disparity. The numbers of what we gained, no matter of doors that were opened versus closed, it was just more and there were more the positive reactions from having done this. It’s interesting that there’s the people that you would expect to stick by you and be supportive that actually are not and then there’s people that you wouldn’t expect who would be on board and supportive that would be. This new project came out of the COVID years and a lot of audience members and people - and particularly bookers, promoters, presenters - during COVID, it’s almost as if their world just paused in terms of what the artist is doing and that’s not how it works. People live and grow, especially when the world literally shuts down and it shakes everyone into their core...of course it’s going to change you and the way it changed me was: life is too short to not sing all the music I want to sing, so I’m going to develop this project that’s going to do this at X, Y & Z, and if people get it, great, if they don’t, whatever. And a lot of the people that I expected to be on board with that weren’t and the people that I didn’t expect were. So, you know, it was a bit of a shock, but in a good way.

Look at how we handle social media: you could have hundred people telling you how amazing and important you are to them but the one person that says “I don’t like this” is the one that gets to you. That, of course, will bother me but then I have to change my perspective on this because if I let them get to me, I won’t be able to create and to write, and that’s what I’m designed to do.

So what I do is switch the perspective and say: this person just liked what I was doing before, I should take that as a compliment and I answer and said “Thank you, I’m so glad you like the stuff that happened before. There will be more of that down the road, so if you don’t like what I’m doing now, no worries. You have 20 years of a career to enjoy. That’s all.



Photo by Tatiana Gorilovsky

How do you handle social media, do they bring any pressure to you and do you enjoy using them?

No, I don't enjoy it at all. Don't get me wrong, I love to connect with people in a very direct way and that's not what I'm talking about. I don't enjoy what it stands for. It's designed to make people feel... like... it's shrouded in worlds of individuality and expression, but it's really designed to make people follow suit and follow trends and stick to the programme and do what everyone else is doing because that's how they make money. They make money by clicks and and shares and it's the more disgusting, or the more shocking or the more horrible, the more inciting, provoking... You know, there's a way to provoke without spreading ugliness, hatred and negativity. So that's what I mean when I don't enjoy it. Just like when The Cave people of ancient history had to figure out fire and how to use it for their own benefit...sometimes you get burned if you're not really using the tool properly. So I think we have to approach it like it's fire, it's incredibly dangerous. It's a weapon if used improperly, but if you can manipulate it and use it as a tool for your own benefit, in a productive way, then you can literally build a life out of that.

You are performing at Ronnie Scott's soon. What can the audience expect and how do you adapt/what do you consider when you are performing to different audiences and venues across the world (intimate venues vs big venues)?

I made a choice not to change the 'transgenre' show - in the theatrical rock and the glam rock elements - based on the venues we're playing, because I wanted to make a point of what this show is and because of how diverse the show is. Just to say: I'm unapologetically who I am and if it doesn't fit, that's because I don't fit this room. I'm not going to try and change myself to fit a room. That was the purpose of that show.

Now that Dame is out there and next year I'm putting out a jazz record, I have less of a weight on my shoulders to prove my point.

Now that people can follow the path in a very clearly defined way, I come back to Ronnie Scott's and, because my album that's coming out next year is based on home - whether it's your hometown, the home you live in, the home you long to live in, being on the road - it's like the road weary songs but songs of coming to terms with the grief of my father's passing, which is why I chose to pursue a jazz career in the first place, because I wanted to feel close to my father's spirit. Just kind of like coming full circle back around to these, being in touch with one's roots again with, of course, sprinkled the 'transgenre' elements in there. This is a more intimate concept and a more intimate setting sets the scene very well for this.

You recently posted about 'The Ultimate Live Singer online training program' that you are involved in. Tell us about your teaching career.

Well, I've not been a teacher in the conventional sense of I teach a class and my students kind of come and go. I'm like Mary Poppins: the wind carries me on to the next student that needs me!

With 'The Ultimate Live Singer online training program', we help artists work on specific things: if they want to get into more scatting and improvisation, or if an artist is doing an album and they don't know how to... It's not just singing: it's how to be an artist, a musician and bandleader. That's what the 'Ultimate Live Singer' touches on. It's not a vocal course per sé, it's a band leading course and there's of course elements of singing in there, technique and all that, but it's the full spectrum that I definitely didn't get even in school.

Of course, I had years of experience coming in, having had a career before I was in college but I'm looking at all the other singers who are in college with me, and they're not getting those skills and that training as much as one should - maybe because the opportunities weren't there. It's not like it was in New York where there's a lot of performing opportunities. Miami didn't have much, maybe a restaurant gig here and there in a hotel lobby, but there were no clubs so that was a bit hard. And that's what I hope to give to people: if they can't find that sort of

training 'cause their resources or their environment, I hope to share those stories and experiences so that they can feel that they have it within themselves to do this.

What are the most valuable lessons you have learnt as a live performance vocalist?

There's obviously practising, there's rehearsing, there's performing, there's so many different tiers of your approach and why you're singing a certain thing.

If you're just by yourself practising, there's a lot of thought; singing and performing is thinking about a million things at once and then not thinking when you go to perform. I like to think of it like drilling. When you're at the gym or when you're swimming, you have these drills that you do to get muscle memory worked into what you do. So much of like my "Cherokee" solo with Wynton: so much of that is... it's not like I'm singing lines that I've memorised for rote... muscle memory in that way. But it's just like I know this line conveys this certain feeling. It's like you're having a conversation with somebody and sometimes when we talk to people, particularly in interviews, there are some lines that you've said before in other interviews but you're not thinking that you're going to say it because it already worked. I guess that's a theme in my interviewing style that keeps popping up. So when you perform and you watch yourself, listen to yourself and you can identify what those patterns are and, if that's a pattern, why is it a pattern and how can you hone it on that and make it something that's uniquely your voice, your language and make it a little more sophisticated. That's the practise mentality but it's all kind of like a cycle around each other. You learn by watching and listening to yourself just as much as you learn from listening to the greats.

Veronica is performing at Ronnie Scott's on August 9th.
[Tickets available here](#)

VERONICA SWIFT



this bitter earth

VERONICA SWIFT



— CONFESSIONS —

VERONICA SWIFT

STORRY by Tatiana Gorilovsky
Barbican
London
2025

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THE
PHOTOGRAPHERS

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Ronnie Scott's
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WELCOME TO GUEST CONTRIBUTOR SHIREEN FISHER!



Shireen is a lifestyle journalist and content writer for various print publications and digital platforms. She's also a radio presenter for Fine Music Radio, Cape Town's Jazz and Classical station. Her long-standing appreciation for jazz deepened significantly after completing the Cape Town International Jazz Festival's Arts Journalism program in 2017. It was a full-circle moment when she joined Fine Music Radio in 2022.

During her career, Shireen has had the opportunity to interview a diverse range of artists, including Escalandrum, Ibrahim Khalil Shihab, Hilton Schilder, the queen of Afro-jazz, Judith Sephuma, and

Tunde Baiyewu from the Lighthouse Family. You can catch her hosting Shireen Fisher In the Lounge every Friday night from 21:00 to midnight SAST on Fine Music Radio.

[Follow Shireen here](#)

BEYOND BOUNDARIES: MELORIE JANE'S CONTEMPORARY JAZZ, ROOTED IN AFRICAN SOUL



Melorie Jane, a vibrant voice in contemporary South African jazz, has always understood music as an intrinsic part of her being. This innate connection, nurtured by years of singing in choir as a child, cemented a lifelong ambition. Her journey has seen her evolve into a formidable pianist, vocalist, and composer, whose recent performance at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival (CTIJF) was, in her own words, "absolutely amazing."

For Melorie, gracing the CTIJF stage represented a significant highlight, a chance to connect with a diverse audience from across the globe. Her dynamic quintet, with Muneeb Hermans on trumpet, Jessie Julies on saxophone, Chadleigh Gowar on bass and Chante Phillips on drums, collectively delivered a performance that resonated deeply with the diverse audience, showcasing the distinctive sound that has quickly made her a standout artist.

Music has always been the artist's natural lan-

guage. Her earliest influences weren't found in a formal music school, but rather at home, where she listened to her father play the piano "mainly by ear." This organic introduction fostered a deep, intuitive connection to melody. "Music has been sort of part of my life, and I also started playing by following him and playing by ear," she shared. Beyond the keys, her voice found its early home in the school choir, where she began singing at just seven years old. From those nascent experiences, a clear path emerged: "Since I was very young, I wanted to do music."

Her formal education took an unexpected turn at the University of Pretoria. Faced with a choice between classical music and jazz, Melorie, knowing little about the latter, took a leap of faith. It was a decision that would redefine her artistic direction. "I started realizing how amazing jazz is," she recalled. "I was drawn to it, so I started learning about it, and I loved it. I then decided that I wanted to go into it." This newfound fascination ignited a rigorous exploration of this genre, both its

international traditions and its vibrant South African iterations. What truly captivated Melorie about jazz was its inherent sense of dialogue. "What's great about jazz is the interactivenss of it," she explained. "The band is all bringing their sound, and some of their background and stories, and even the crowd can interact." This live, collaborative energy became a cornerstone of her creative philosophy.

A pivotal moment in her journey was encountering South African jazz at the Grahamstown Jazz Festival. She was captivated by its complex textures. "It inspired me, all these interesting sorts of layers... almost like interwoven into each other," she recalls. This discovery highlighted how diverse musical backgrounds could coalesce into something profoundly beautiful, a mosaic of "contemporary and traditional and other musics that are weaving together."

Today, Melorie Jane's sound is a vibrant fusion, a testament to her diverse influences. While rooted in jazz, she unapologetically incorporates elements of "Afro-funk, contemporary jazz, and South African influences." She labels her style "contemporary jazz," a descriptor that allows for the integration of neo-soul and even subtle rock undertones, all while improvisation remains at the core.

Crucially, the spirit of South African jazz permeates her compositions. "I also love incorporating the South African jazz elements, some grooves and feel," she emphasized. "It is contemporary, but it's rooted in South African jazz." Living in Franschhoek and being close to Cape Town has subtly shaped this evolution. While her Pretoria roots are still audible in her music, the Mother City's "big culture of straight-ahead jazz" and the sheer "energy that people have when they play" have undeniably influenced her newer artistic path.

"I think my time in Pretoria has had a big impact on my music, and people often say that they can hear when I play music from Tshwane. I also feel that Cape Town has a significant culture of straight-ahead jazz, which has influenced my newer music path. And then the Cape Jazz - the energy that is here, that people have when

they play."

Her inspirations are far-reaching, extending beyond jazz to include artists like Coldplay and Buena Vista Social Club. Coldplay's "beautiful compositional style," particularly their use of harmony, has pushed her compositions "beyond just the very jazz sound," lending an "almost film-like" quality. Her long-standing affection for Cuban and Latin music, ignited during childhood, finds its way into her work through the "rhythmic element" and the "energy and the fast pace" inspired by Buena Vista Social Club.

Within the South African jazz pantheon, Melorie names artists who fundamentally shaped her writing. "I always credit the same people in the beginning because they've influenced me fundamentally in my writing. It's people like Kyle Shepherd, Bokani Dyer, Nduduzo Makhathini and Carlo Makhathini. Later, I learned about people like Bheki Mseleku and the composers from whom this group drew inspiration. So, I would say it's a very interwoven history of music, and we all get from each other as well."

Melorie Jane's discography offers a window into her personal and artistic growth. Her solo career truly began to germinate after her move to Franschhoek in 2017. Her debut single, 'Till the Morning Comes' (2017), and the 'Different View' EP (2018) swiftly captivated both audiences and critics, setting the stage for what was to come.

Her critically acclaimed debut, "More or Less," released in 2021, was primarily composed during the lockdown. "Often in turmoil and tough times, music comes out," she reflects. The album drew inspiration from her experiences and the profound resilience she witnessed in others, along with their unwavering faith and acts of connection.

Her latest offering, "Hold the Stars," released in 2024, delves even deeper into personal narrative. "Hold the Stars for me was a very personal album," she shared.

"I wrote a lot of the music actually from my experience of faith. I am a Christian, and my experience of how God relates to me and my experience of that and his love." This album, she feels, encapsulates "a lot of the growth musically that I've gone through" since her debut. Tracks like the vibrant single "Dancing and Laughing" and "Now Open Your Eyes" signal her current trajectory - energetic, forward-moving, and brimming with joy.

Having performed extensively both locally and internationally, Melorie holds a special place in her heart for Cape Town audiences. "The local festivals are amazing because the people here are so hungry for music and they give such an amazing response, which you just feed off as a musician. It's so lovely," she says, expressing heartfelt appreciation for the "Capetonian audience."

For aspiring young jazz artists, Melorie Jane offers earnest advice: "Just keep working, and learn from other people. For me, faith is a basis." It's a philosophy that guides her path, allowing her to evolve and enrich the vibrant South African jazz landscape continually, one soulful note at a time.

As for what lies ahead, Melorie Jane is embracing a profoundly personal and creative chapter. Beyond the stage, her focus is shifting excitedly towards motherhood, as she anticipates the arrival of her first baby at the end of 2025. "It's an exciting and creative time for me," she shares, hinting that this new journey will undoubtedly inspire the next evolution of her soulful sound.

[Click here for Melorie's website](#)



ASHELY JACKSON



Photo by Julia Comita



Photo by Julia Comita

TAKE ME TO THE WATER: IN CONVERSATION WITH ASHLEY JACKSON

by ISABEL MARQUEZ

Award-winning harpist Ashley Jackson has released her second album 'Take Me to the Water', and debut under Decca Records US. The album is evocative, fusing various musical styles, from classical music to Black spirituals, soul and jazz. 'Take Me to the Water' is an exploration into the power of water, featuring Jackson's tales on iconic works by Margaret Bonds, Alice Coltrane, Claude Debussy and Brandee Younger. I was intrigued to understand why Jackson felt so connected to this narrative, as well as the musical influences and works which build the foundations for the album itself.

Firstly, how are you? How has 2025 been so far?

I am well! Summer is my favourite season. I am home more and not commuting back and forth for teaching as much now. I think of Summer as an important time for me to reset and open up to my creative ideas. So yes very well!

Professionally, the biggest news has been releasing my album 'Take me to the Water'. It's my first album with Decca US Records, so I've been enjoying that experience of making that music and sharing it with fans and new audiences. The reception has been very positive! Now I've been trying to relax and enjoy those moments, but also think about what's coming next.

Amazing, and before Decca Records, you were independent?

Yes, I released my first solo album 'Ennanga' under Bright Shiny Things in 2023 and it did very well on streaming platforms and got very lovely reviews. After that album came out, I started talking to Decca US.

And what has that transition been like?

On the creative side, I have felt like myself and have not been asked to do things that do not represent me and my own voice, so on that front it has been seamless. The team at Decca US is very generous, kind, interesting and creative, and everyone I have worked with over there have made it a great experience.

With the recording process, were there any huge changes that you noticed?

No, I was able to bring the musicians I wanted to work with, as well as the producers and choose the space. I felt very free to do what I enjoy doing the most, trying out new ideas and letting the music speak for itself.

Could you tell me a little bit more about 'Take Me to the Water' and where it came from, how it came about and why you picked these particular artists to represent on the album?

'Take Me to the Water' began as an exploration into the different metaphors that water can suggest in African American spirituals. So, I began with Deep River, which was already part of my repertoire, Take Me to the Water which is a baptism hymn and Troubled Water by Margaret Bonds which is based on Wade in the

Water. I sort of just took those pieces and dived into what water can represent. I knew from the outside that I wanted to expand the geographical representation, and not just include music of my ancestors but to make it more of a global statement. So, I started thinking about what water meant and the way it makes me feel. I love swimming and the summer season! I was also simultaneously thinking about the music that I love to play and finding the synergies between what water can represent for me personally and how I can bring people together, and how the music that I love can aid this narrative.

So, as well as those four pieces, I wanted to include another piece by Alice Coltrane as I have been on this lifelong journey of studying her and her music. I wanted to include Radhe-Shyam, which is about Krishna and his beloved, an idea of love, unity and water bringing people together. There is a piece by Brandee Younger on my record, Unrest, which I have had in my repertoire since it was published. It's about protest, so I was thinking about access to water within communities. Danse Sacrée is a piece that has been in my bones for a long time, and the rumour was that it was inspired by a watercolor painting of the water.

Once I had all these pieces laid out, I needed to ensure that they spoke to one another and I wanted the larger idea to be that despite the differences that we might hear and focus on, there are connections that are really powerful between these different styles of music.

And how do you take a piece that already exists and make it your own? How do you put your spin on it?

So with the Alice Coltrane piece, I use her moments of improvisation as permission to play around with my own strengths. I think it starts with me recognising that I am not her, and I am not seeking to replicate exactly what she does, but maybe I can come close to the way that she makes us feel, and the tools that I have to communicate that will be different. So it's really a lot of trial and error, I do a lot of listening and deciding what I want the music to communicate, and just playing around with

different textures and ideas. I think that is the greatest gift that a composer like Alice Coltrane gives us, an invitation to be yourself and try new things, and the music is very spacious in that way. I do a lot of recording myself and listening back, and I think about the album in its entirety and listen to what I've worked on in the context of other pieces around it and how it fits in. It is haphazard in some ways, and I sit at my harp playing around with ideas and harmonies, but then very consciously see what is working. I hear how the harp is singing and how it is making me feel, and what I'm doing to create that feeling and sensation: it's a lot of back and forth.

Could you tell me about your musical upbringing and how you came across the harp?

Yes, so I have three sisters and all of us took piano lessons when we were young and I found that music spoke to me in that way. I felt like it was my little safe space, as the middle sibling. My first piano teacher noticed that musical curiosity right away, I was 5 when I began, and she has a niece who was a young harpist at the time, beginning to build her own private studio. Because of the similarities between the instruments, she thought that the harp might be a good fit, and I began studying harp at age 6.

Were you always interested in jazz, or was it a combination of music?

I am classically trained, so in terms of my musical upbringing, for a really long time I felt like the music that I studied and was playing was one thing, and the music I grew up listening to, my parents' music, jazz, gospel, soul was another. It was not until I got further along in my graduate studies, that I began to find the space to bring all of this together. Because I loved it all and wanted to have a space for it. These albums really allowed me to put that forward.

So, you said you were teaching in New York? Are you also performing regularly?





Photo by Julia Comita

This year I was in an album release cycle, and because it was my first with Decca US, I really wanted to put my energies towards that and understanding how it would all work and what was demanded of me in regard to releasing an album. I am always performing, it was a smaller year because I needed to be on hand for whatever was asked of me, but next year I will be resuming a busier performing schedule of this music and whatever else comes my way.

I am up for tenure where I currently teach, so this past year has also been very busy in terms of preparing my tenure file and looking back at my work and assembling it all together. What is coming up next year will be very interesting, hopefully I get tenure! I have always maintained a balance between teaching and playing, I tell my students and my audiences. I don't think of it as a separation, my teaching really helps me as a performer, how I talk to different bodies and populations allows me to think about how my music can be reached by as wide an audience as possible and vice versa.

With your teaching, your writing and your interest in music history, why Margaret Bonds? Why was she someone that you were drawn to?

My introduction to her first came from reading an encyclopedia that was shown to me at the beginning of my doctoral studies. It included a list of piano music written by Black composers, and I remember thinking 'Wow this is so great, I've never seen a resource like this!' And I put a pin in it, and when it became time to start thinking about different topics for my research, I wanted to look further into Black women composers. As I was reading different biographies I resonated most with Margaret Bonds. I think most because she was a lover of literature and history, and that plays such a big role in the musical traces that she makes. She was very close with the poet Langston Hughes, and I was intrigued by that. I liked the idea of having to do research in Harlem, where she lived for most of her life and having access to her music in New York,

so from a practical standpoint that was quite attractive.

So, once I settled on her story and focused on one particular piece, Ballad of the Brown King, reading her letters and seeing her write to friends and Langston Hughes, she just seemed like a woman who was filled with music and just wanted to use her gifts to make people feel loved and her communities feel heard. As somebody who was thinking about her own career once I graduated, I just thought to myself, here is someone who has done it at a very difficult time in the 1950s/60s. Certainly not without difficulties, but she persevered, and so I resonated with that and wanted to make a space for myself to do the same.

How do you think your writing and music reflects the world today?

I only can write about and respond to what I feel and what I see. I have been very fortunate to have lived in New York, where you really are experiencing an infinite number of cultures and ideas. I think for me, if there is one thread in my work, I hope that it's an acknowledgement that we are connected through a shared humanity where we all feel love and sadness, and that personally drives my work. There is so much going on in the world, and we have more access to what is going on everywhere, so we are regularly overwhelmed with all this information. Because of the media and social media, where people have to pick sides or where sides are picked for us, through filters and algorithms, I try to spend some time away from that and remember why I do what I do. I grew up being told and really believing that I have a gift and I have to use it. So I want to use my talents to make sure I am uplifting people and giving something positive back to my communities.

Obviously we are all seeing what is going on in the news in America, it is very concerning. Funding being cut, DEI initiatives being closed down and general livelihood put at risk, what has life been like for you as a musician in that changing environment?

Certainly some of the organisations that I work with and ensembles I play with have experienced some of those cuts and stopped receiving grants that they normally receive. Because I was in New York during the pandemic, I think those organisations unfortunately already had experience in suddenly losing a lot, and found ways to pivot and regroup, reprogram and continue outsider access. So I do think some of those organizations and ensembles will have a similar reckoning.

Have I felt it personally yet? No, I think because they are so fresh, they will affect the following fiscal years to come. We may not feel it so much right now, but we will in the next 5-10 years. And it differs between the sizes of these organisations and ensembles, who have been made to rethink their boards and DEI initiatives. Again, we won't see these changes right away, but maybe certain composer programmes and residencies may not exist in the way we've seen them. As someone who lives in Louisiana and works in New York, I feel very blessed to experience a different part of the US. I am from the North East, so I see this as a learning opportunity to meet lots of different people. We are all living, breathing human beings who have unfortunately been caught in this very deep political divide. I don't know what the future holds.

I feel fortunate to have entered into this relationship with Decca at this time, because having gone through the pandemic I understand that my performances may not always be a given, for whatever reason now. But people still love and listen to music, so perhaps my audiences will not always be in front of me, but still listening to my music around the world.

[Click here for Ashley's website](#)





MARIANNE MCGREGOR

TALKS TO FIONA MACTAGGART

Award-winning vocalist Marianne McGregor is one of Scotland's most popular jazz singer-songwriters. She has recently released a new album entitled *Make Believe*, to notable acclaim in the UK jazz press, so now seems an excellent time to speak with her to hear what she has been up to lately and what's in store for the future.

Hello Marianne. Thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy gigging schedule to speak to me. Can I start by congratulating you on your recent album, *Make Believe*, your third I believe. I found it to be so beautiful, and I understand it was self-composed?

Thank you so much. Yes, I composed the songs myself and I'm really proud of how the album turned out. I had a few years' hiatus from releasing original music, so it feels good to come back with something that represents me.

How did you go about composing the music and lyrics, and which came first?

I don't have a 'go-to' method for writing songs, it usually happens organically and in an unplanned way. I like to write lyrics, poetry and play with language to express a fun and honest point of view. I'll often write freely for pages and see if I can find a phrase I like, then I'll try to spark song ideas from that phrase. Other times a song can just pour out onto the page in one go. I come up with melody ideas when I'm on the go with normal life, so I often record voice-notes on my phone to remember them. Then, later on, I sit at the piano and start to merge these lyric and melody ideas along with some jazzy chords.

Which musicians joined you on this album? And did you receive any funding assistance?

I was delighted to work with some exceptional musicians on this album, it's been really rewarding and humbling. Playing alongside musicians who challenge me and bring so much to the music is really important in both recording sessions and live shows. The album features improvised solos from myself and all the other musicians playing, so there's a really exciting element.

'Make Believe' was generously funded by Creative Scotland. This opportunity has been amazing, to have the means to make a 'dream' album. I feel really happy with the record. I wanted to present new music with notable elevation in my musicianship, songwriting and storytelling.

Well, it's such a wonderful album! I'm wondering about how you arrived at the stage you are at now. Can you say a little bit about your background?

Of course! I've always been into music, and I've been singing since I was a child. I grew up in Orkney and I was lucky to have an upbringing surrounded by music and creative possibilities. I think it was in my early teens that I really took to jazz and decided I wanted to be a jazz singer. I moved to Glasgow at 18 and studied Popular Music at college, and since graduating in 2015 I've been a full-time self-employed musician. I feel like I worked from the ground up, starting at 18 with busking and bar gigs, and now performing headline spots at jazz festivals!

Photo by E Dingwall

You say you grew up being “surrounded by music”. So, apart from you, do any of your family work in music or other creative areas?

Yes! I have a very musical family. I grew up with constant music of all genres in the house. My mum is a composer and flautist, and when I was growing up, she would teach piano and flute lessons from our living room. She taught me a lot of music when I was little, and she always made music seem so free and possible for me. Mum is working now as a composer, performer and university lecturer. I have musical brothers as well; one is a violinist and university professor. He taught me a lot of jazz standards when I was a kid. And I have another brother who is an excellent folk guitarist in a ceilidh band. My grandma was an amazing artist and painter, and she always said how she would have loved to be a singer. She was a total character, I think I take after her!

What a lovely musical background. What is it, do you think, that has drawn your interest in particular to Jazz?

I’ve always gravitated to really expressive singing, connecting with the idea that you could sing the same phrase in thousands of different ways. I was listening to the great Jazz singers since I was a kid. I heard Billie Holiday sing with such pain, Nina Simone being so powerful and poignant, and of course Ella swinging like nobody’s business. I liked to copy them, and I guess I was finding my footing with my own voice and where it could fit within Jazz. Listening to Amy Winehouse when I was a teenager was a huge influence too. I learned the French Horn and classical singing while I was at school, but I guess ultimately the appeal with singing Jazz is all the freedom I have, to make each performance my personal interpretation of the music, with delivery based on how I feel in the moment. I liked playing classical music, but it has set rules on how the music should be played [whereas] Jazz feels like it provides a template - then you can do whatever you want with it!

Do you have any plans for the future that you are able to share with us?

I’m really busy this year! It’s been so good, the album came out at the end of June, and my six-piece band did a launch gig in Glasgow Jazz Festival at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. Then a few weeks later in July we did a headline gig in Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival at the famous Spiegeltent.

I’m taking a little time to recover, [I’ll] keep promoting the album and maybe start thinking up ideas for the next album. I have a few more exciting big gigs this year, some touring in Scotland and am planning some gigs further afield for next year. I do have some ideas for my next release, but I don’t want to give too much away. Stay tuned!

We will indeed stay tuned, and we expect to hear a lot more from you over the coming year and beyond!

[Marianne and Fiona are both founder members of the Scottish Jazz collective, Jazz Forward.](#)

[Marianne’s website](#)

[Marianne's bandcamp](#)

[Marianne’s Instagram](#)

Photo by Harrison Reid

BEHIND THE LENS

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

Monika S Jakubowska

ASA by Monika S Jakubowska

Kinga Glyk by Monika S Jakubowska
Ronnie Scotts
London
July 2025



ronnie scott's

JAZZ CLUB



She Writes the Songs
Sarah Jane Morris, Sarah Gillespie, Jo Harrop,
Aria and Polly Gibbons
May 2025
Ronnie Scotts
London
July 2025

Belle Chen
May 2025
Kings Place
London
April 2025



Belle Chen and Violeta Vicci

May 2025

Kings Place

London

April 2025



J STEPS



PHOTO BY NICK SLEEP

The award winning group J Steps is a groundbreaking ensemble for female and non-binary individuals under the age of 18. Founded and directed by Hannah Horton, J Steps was created to counter the lack of spaces and representation for women and non-binary individuals in the jazz scene. J Steps have performed on an album and performed at venues and events like the London Jazz Festival, Swinging Cat Jazz Club, Jazz Cafe POSK, and Saffron Hall. The group won the 2023 Parliamentary Jazz Award for Jazz Education Of The Year and continues to change the lives of young women in jazz every day.

This is the second in an interview series with the J Steps members, getting to know what it's like to be part of the band! In this entry, we are interviewing: Amy Proudfoot (AP), Luisa Elsley (LE) and Lizzie Howden (LH).

Why did you join J Steps?

AP: I wanted to experience more Jazz and I hadn't ever done much improvising, so I thought it would be good to try something new with people who were looking for similar things. I loved the taster session, everyone was really supportive, and it was lots of fun, I still think that it is today.

LE: I think one of the main reasons I joined is that I love Jazz with all my heart, and J Steps opened a lot of doors for me to be able to enjoy it even more than I already did.

LH: Well, at first I got invited but during my taster session I fell in love with the environment at J Steps. Everyone there was so welcoming and I felt not at all judged, even when I couldn't improvise or play the pieces well. It is truly just filled with lovely people and the music is amazing.

What have you got out of J Steps since joining?

AP: J Steps has made me so much more confident in my playing, the opportunity to improvise with supportive people is really great, and performing for audiences at gigs is always

amazing because it's different every time. Being part of J Steps has also improved my music and jazz theory, which helps in exams.

LE: I feel like I've gotten a lot from joining. Everyone supports everyone. I also think joining helped me feel comfortable performing and playing alone.

LH: Since joining J steps, I believe that my ability to perform and confidence when doing so, has greatly increased. It has also encouraged me to listen to a wider range of music and really helped develop my musicianship. As well as this, I have met so many lovely fellow musicians and fans who come to our gigs, which has been a lovely experience.

What's it like playing in an all female/non-binary line up?

AP: It's really interesting because usually there are only one or two women in a jazz band from my experience, and it's wonderful to meet other people with things in common and similar experiences, and I think that it really brings us together as a band and as friends.

LE: It's great playing in an all female line up. It's quite exciting really, in such a male dominated community. It's nice to be around people you know won't judge you.

LH: Playing in an all female line up has helped develop my confidence even more, as everyone is so supportive. It also helps me feel like I am making a difference to the world of music, by proving that girls are just as good as the men (if not better) even in such a male dominated field.

Would you like to continue performing as a career?

AP: It's a possibility, I've thought about going to music college in the future, but also it's hard to know what you want to do, however I think the experience of being in J Steps means that if I were to go into a performing career, I could be more confident about it.



Lizzie Howden
'It's great to have Lizzie on
bass now as well as clarinet.
She gives the group an awe-
some rooting in rhythm and
speed.' HANNAH HORTON

AP: It's a possibility, I've thought about going to music college in the future, but also it's hard to know what you want to do, however I think the experience of being in J Steps means that if I were to go into a performing career, I could be more confident about it.

LE: I don't see why I wouldn't. It's what I love doing, and I doubt that'll change soon – I never liked the idea of sitting at a desk all day either. I love playing my saxophone, it makes me feel free, so yeah. I think that's definitely a large possibility for me.

LH: I would love to continue performing as a career as I truly love music and it is so nice to see all the people who share the interest with me. Performing is such a surreal experience and can't really be replicated by anything else, so I hope I continue to perform in the future.



Amy Proudfoot

‘It’s been wonderful to see Amy grow in talent and confidence since the start of J Steps. She’s fearless on her trumpet and also very generous to others in the group with encouragement and trumpet tips.’

HANNAH HORTON



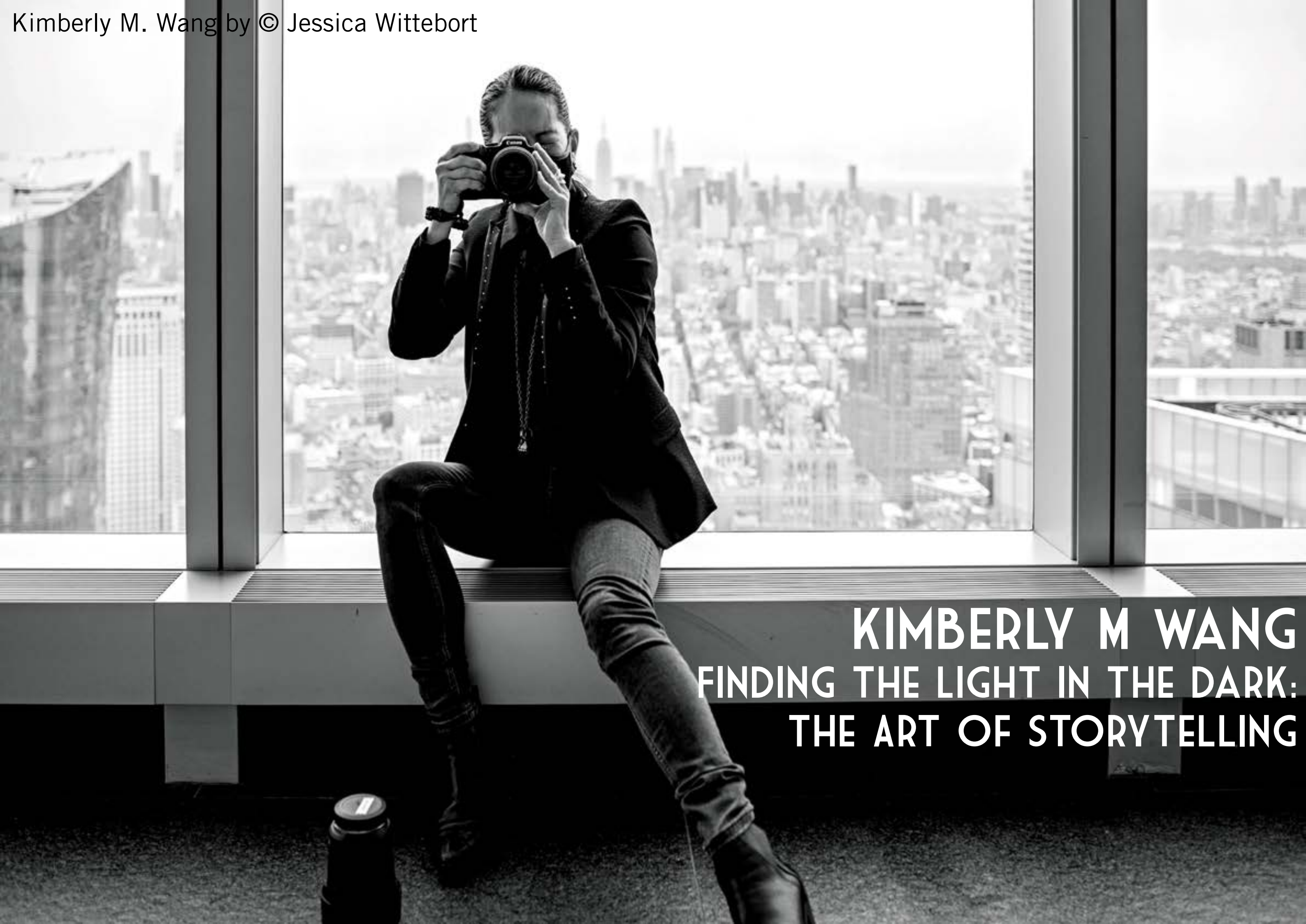
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Luisa Elsley


‘Luisa is literally on fire with her jazz! J Steps have really taken her under their wing as the youngest member and Luisa is thriving at improvisation.’

HANNAH HORTON

Kimberly M. Wang by © Jessica Wittebort



KIMBERLY M WANG
FINDING THE LIGHT IN THE DARK:
THE ART OF STORYTELLING



Kimberly M. Wang.
Los Angeles, Getty Villa
© Frank John Hughes

Kimberly M Wang was born to tell stories. Her unwavering passion to give people a space to be heard, to be authentic and to feel beautiful is profoundly inspirational. Looking through Kimberly's work, you hear, you see, you feel. Her work is important and sublime.

Kimberly's passion for storytelling first drew her to local news but she quickly progressed (to put it mildly). After 20 years of working as a TV Director and producer in New York, having started with PBS and then working for everyone from Martha Stewart, FX to ESPN, MTV and more, surrounded by renowned creatives from Jessica Lange to Wynton Marsalis, she moved into photography. Her portfolio of work is astounding. But it is not just the 'names' she has worked with that stand out, it is the honesty and beauty she captures. Her ability to capture the humanity in someone, their soul and allow it to shine through is truly breathtaking.

A child of immigrants, her mother left Hong Kong at 16, having bought a boat ticket and left home with no help from her family (I cannot wait to explore her story!), eventually met Kimberly's father, who was from Shanghai in Kansas City, where Kimberly was born. Growing up in an area where there were barely any Asian people, Kimberly's experiences had a profound impact on the shape of her work to come and fed her sense of the importance of being seen and heard through the eyes of truth. She finds the light even when it is dark.

It was such an honour to speak to Kimberly about her work, her compassion and her drive for voices to be heard. We had the most inspiring conversation, too much to share in one article, so this is part one!

To start with, I wanted to understand the core of that desire to share people's voices, that empathy and the search for honesty and the vulnerability that lies within that. Kimberly's voice is heard, felt and seen through her photography, but I wanted to create a further space for Kimberly's voice.

That desire for authenticity, the truth...where does that come from?

I can tell you exactly when it started. One thing that you learn as an Asian American person growing up in a Midwestern city, is that you never blend. You always stand out, you are always 'other' and you understand that other people are projecting stories onto you. I became very aware of this when I was young because people called me names, assumed things about me and had ideas about me that had nothing to do with who I actually was.

Initially I wanted to be a print journalist but ended up as a producer and director in television, but I was always driven by knowing that everyone has a story to tell. You just have to ask the right questions. As you know, you have to listen, and you must be present to understand what the story is and have the ability to tell the story in a way that feels real. Some of that comes from understanding that a lot of people feel misunderstood. Famous actors, musicians, politicians, it feels like people are projecting ideas onto them that have nothing to do with them. And that is what I love about the work that I do, whether I'm working with an emerging artist or someone that's already super well established. There's always something about themselves that they feel people aren't seeing enough of. There's a purposefulness, a passion or there's just something that they feel is getting lost that even they haven't been able to identify.

I'll give you another example. When I think about the work I do with folks that are not artists, maybe women, maybe men, maybe they're 40 and over and maybe they just got divorced and they don't feel the way they felt when they were 20, when they felt like the whole world was ahead of them. Now they feel like people don't see them. They feel invisible. They feel disempowered. And they're at a point where they want to be seen – 'I've done all this work in my life. I'm really proud of all these things that I've done, but I still feel self-conscious or small.' There is something unexpressed, so when we work together, so much of that work is about saying

YOU ARE STRONG,
YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL,
YOU ARE POWERFUL.
LET'S FIND WAYS TO
BRING THAT FORWARD.

Then they look at the photos and go, is that really who I am?! Is that me?! And I say, yes, that's you! You've always been strong and powerful and beautiful. We work together. So much of what I want to do is make sure that people can be celebrated and that is really the essence of what I want to do with people. Celebrate them so they will always have these images to look at where they say, I am powerful, I am beautiful, I do have something to say. I am worthy of love.

Having spent years working as a director and producer for TV, Kimberly's storytelling evolved with a clear rejection of fake - the TV industry's newfound love of reality TV –moving into photography with authenticity and truth, always at the heart of her work.

The whole industry changed because everyone wanted to focus on reality TV, and that was when reality TV went from being an aspect of television to a major category - because it was so cheap to produce. My work was always documentary in nature, telling real stories about real people. I had no interest in reality TV because that was about a sort of facsimile of what is real, and I'm not interested in a facsimile of what is real. I'm interested in what is real. I've always loved working with artists and although my work is quite expansive, I collaborate with everyone from executives at Google and Meta, people that are prominent in finance. But I love all my clients, and all of those stories matter to me. In my own life, especially living in New York for nearly 30 years, I've always been in an artistic community. Those are my people. So, in 2008, I felt that it was time to make a change. I thought, let me go back to some of the renowned artists that I had worked with as a TV director and producer and talk to them about creating stories from a still photographer's perspective. The difference between coming into a room to

work with a famous artist with a camera crew and a lighting truck and audio and all of that is significant. Coming into a room just as yourself, me with my camera, no audio running, I learned I was able to capture something so special with these folks that have been photographed their whole lives. They've been documented and photographed, interviewed dozens and dozens and dozens of times over their illustrious careers. But when I came in just as myself, not with my whole crew, I learned they're able to reveal an aspect of themselves that they don't normally do. It creates a kind of intimate atmosphere that's so special. And I think because I trained as a documentarian, it's not about me. My stories aren't about me; they are about the artists and people that I collaborate with, that I document. So, I can be sitting with the multi-Grammy winning, Olivier Award-winning, legendary mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, backstage at the Opera House in Barcelona, in her dressing room while she's about to go on stage. But I'm quiet as a mouse because I know how to preserve the safe space. I understand their demeanour, I understand what they need. I understand it's not about me. So, I can be in a room with someone like that and document them and find moments that are normally so private. It's such a gift to be able to do.

Looking through your work and the authenticity that you capture, is no easy task! Creating a space where people feel comfortable, being at ease and just being able to be themselves, cannot be underestimated. The pure joy and beauty that you see in your photos, is incredible. I think that's like your superpower.

Thank you for saying that. It's such a privilege for me to work with artists that have been documented many times by Vogue, huge publications, because I understand that for an artist to be an artist, they have to protect their space. They need you to understand that they have their public face, they have their private face, and they have their creative space, right? So, there's all these different aspects to who they are and in order for me to capture what I want to capture, which is to really reveal the essence of who they are, I have to understand all those discrete spaces and to get to the core of who they are. I must be able to sort of tease out



Dee Dee Bridgewater and her daughter
Tulani Bridgewater Kowalski.
Los Angeles
© Kimberly M. Wang

those little bits and the way that I do that is I always spend time with folks before we shoot. When an artist comes to me and commissions me to create an album cover, press materials or just to document them on tour or something, the first thing we do is I meet with them either in person at their homes or if they're on the road, via Zoom and we do a lot of practical things, work out their wardrobe, talk about locations and all of that. But really the reason I spend those few hours with them initially is because it gives them a comfort level with me. I have found that even with people that have been photographed incessantly since they started to become well known, even some of those people, some of the famous actors I've worked with, they don't really love being taken until they work with me. I think that they felt objectified maybe in some way, or they felt like the work with that photographer is just about the photo, not really about them.

My work isn't just about creating an image. It is about creating something that's projecting who you are and that's a different thing. So, the time we spend together is so important because they get to look me in the eye, we laugh together. They reveal to me what they're self-conscious about, talk about what's really important to their story and all of these things are information that I need to have as I'm visualising what we're going to do together. It also makes the shoot day go so well, because once we've laughed together, I've literally stood in your closet, you've tried on clothes in front of me, so they feel like they know me, and that's an important part. I'm really interested in who they are, what they want to project, what their story is and what their struggles are.

THE MORE I KNOW ABOUT THEM, THE MORE I AM ABLE TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT FEELS TRULY AUTHENTIC.

That desire to make sure people are seen and heard, has that intensified even more with the current political climate in the US? It feels like there are even more people that feel unheard, unseen, and the importance of platforms to share voices is even more important now. How has that impacted your work?

It is so very important to me to tell stories about people that are vulnerable. And so many people in this country are vulnerable. Immigrants, refugees, people of colour, the LGBTQ community, Jewish people, Palestinian people. I feel like a lot of people that I know, in my community and beyond feel threatened and I really believe it is only storytelling that can make a difference. Only the arts can do that and really make an impact in a world where people don't read the news or they don't believe the news, where they're not looking at sources that are reliable. It is only through storytelling that people can understand. These people are actually supporting our community, building our communities, making our communities safe. So, yes, to me telling stories about people who have been disregarded or have been cast as the enemy in this country, that's super important.

Society has sadly moved into a space where, as you say, people are not researching, not reading, taking headlines as truth, the 'quick read', which is a huge problem, but it does highlight the importance of imagery. Photography is much more likely to be seen and heard. The power of an image is significant. It can say so much.

I absolutely agree and I do feel like during this time, two of the categories of professions that I'm most appreciative of right now are journalists - print, online, photo etc - and lawyers. Attorneys are fighting for our rights and trying to preserve and protect the Constitution and democracy and journalists who are being threatened by the administration here and abroad. Where would we be without those stories and truth being investigated and disseminated? People do not really know what's happening behind closed doors. So,



Shantell Martin.
Artist, Philosopher, Choreographer,
Songwriter.
Los Angeles
© Kimberly M. Wang

I'm so grateful for all the journalists out there who risk their lives, literally, to tell stories that we need to hear to make the decisions we need to make in terms of how we vote. How we stand up. How we are heard. These people are protecting our very way of life and our freedom, so I'm super grateful for all of them.

This leads us beautifully into exploring some of the powerful, incredible women that you have shot. I was thrilled to see a photo of the mighty Ruth Bader Ginsburg! I know she was a huge supporter of the arts: "Music is the one time when my head isn't filled with briefs and opinions, and all that is put on a shelf, and I just enjoy, or I'm thinking about the performance,". Please tell me about that experience.

One of the things that I'm so grateful for is that so many of the artists that I work with, we end up becoming dear friends. And one of those friends is the multi Grammy, Olivier Award-winning, legendary mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, who is considered the best of her generation.

Joyce DiDonato is such a stellar human being because not only is she so accomplished as an artist, but every spare minute she has, she is giving her time to help make the world a more equitable place and to bring music and opera into all the different corners of the world. She's trying to help share music with young people who normally would never get to hear opera or understand what it's about and that it's really about storytelling. She created an album and a tour that was sparked by the attacks in Paris a number of years ago, and when she launched that album, she created a website where she asked people – and I'm paraphrasing - in times of crisis, how do you respond? People went on to the website and gave their responses. Because over the years she had developed a relationship with Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was her friend because she just loved opera. Towards the end of that tour, as I recall, she went to Justice Ginsburg and said I'd love to do an event at the Kennedy Centre and talk about the power of music to create change. It was the most beautiful idea

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and
Mezzo Soprano Joyce DiDonato.
Kennedy Center, Washington D.C.
© Kimberly M. Wang

and she asked me to come to Washington, DC and photograph that day. It was absolutely one of the most memorable and important moments of my life where I had the great privilege of spending half a day with Justice Ginsburg. This was about a year before she passed, and her schedule was so incredibly intense. I asked her about what she had, kind of, on the docket and what was going on, and there was so much and it was a reminder to me that no matter what age you are, you can always be making a difference in some way. She never stopped working, I think probably until the day that she passed. I was just so inspired by her.

To see her enjoy someone I admire deeply, talk about the power of music and how to create change in the world. It gets to the essence of why I love what I do because I do believe that without art and music and culture, films, novels, all these things, what kind of society would we be?

With so much to share and explore, the second part of our interview will be in the next magazine. We explore working with Dee Dee and Tulani Bridgewater, legacy portraiture and her work with Planned Parenthood and the Lin-Manuel Miranda Family Foundation and so much more.

But I will leave you with this:

When Kimberly M Wang was a sophomore, she stood up at her school town hall and raised her concerns about students having to choose between art and music. She told the town hall that they need to make art and music more accessible. Afterwards, she was called into the headmasters office and told that she was ‘giving the girls ideas’ and he would really appreciate it if she didn’t come back to the school next year.

Thank you Kimberly for all of your inspirational work. The world is truly a better place because of you.

[Click here for Kimberly M. Wang website](#)





Joyce Didonato.
Multi Grammy Award Winning Mezzo
Soprano
Carnegie Hall
© Kimberly M. Wang



Georgia Pazcoguin.
Actress, New York City Ballet Soloist,
Tony-nominated Producer, Founder: Final Bow for Yellowface.
Los Angeles
© Kimberly M. Wang



Audrey Zahn
Actress, Singer, Dancer
Los Angeles
© Kimberly M. Wang

HIGHWORTH JAZZ FESTIVAL



A CELEBRATION OF THE 2ND HIGHWORTH JAZZ FESTIVAL

BY KIM CYPHER

Last time I wrote about the 2025 Highworth Jazz Festival there was much excitement. You can read my interview with festival organisers Ray Stephens and Martin Wellstead in the previous magazine here [LINK](#)

After much planning and attention to detail, the festival took place on Saturday 31st May, and it can only be described as a perfect day. As a performer in the festival myself, what's not going to be perfect about getting together with fellow musicians to celebrate jazz?

On arrival, the first thing that hit me was the happy atmosphere. The Market Square was buzzing as people sat enjoying the sunshine whilst listening to the opening band 'Stolen Chocolates' who is fronted by one of my very good friends, wonderful jazz vocalist Nicole Warfield.

As I walked across the square I bumped into one of the festival organisers Martin Wellstead who immediately greeted me with a big hug and, although clearly very busy with jobs to do, was full of positive energy for the day ahead.

Who should I then see at the merchandise stall? Only our very own 'Women in Jazz Media' founder, Fiona Ross. Of course, we got chatting and we were a little bit excited about our performance together which was coming up in the afternoon in the United Reform Church.

I headed to The Highworth Hotel to go and see another friend of mine, jazz vocalist Karolina Griškut performing with her quartet. As I crossed over the road to the hotel, I caught a glimpse of festival organiser Ray Stephens running along the road. He was on a mission of

some kind, and I think he spent pretty much all day running around between the festival venues!

I tried to soak up as much of the atmosphere as I could before my own performances with Fiona Ross and her phenomenal band and with my own band in one of the closing slots of the festival. I managed to catch some wonderful performances, and I enjoyed many conversations with fellow musician friends who I rarely have the opportunity to see – Hannah Horton, Tommy Scott, Sophie Alloway, Tori Freestone, Ian Bateman, Alan Barnes, Marvin Muoneké...

So, for me, this is already a perfect day – a jazz community / family coming together to share great music and happy times.

Throughout the day and evening, festivalgoers happily roamed around, dipping in and out of the varied lineup of musicians. There was much laughter, dancing and support for all the bands.

The team of lovely, friendly 'Festival Makers' were on hand throughout the day and were absolutely brilliant supporting the musicians with logistics and moving equipment etc.

Here's a taste of the day, captured beautifully by festival photographers Pete Wilson and Ron Milsom.

I know plans are already afoot for next year's festival so please do keep an eye out for that. Martin and Ray are continuing to leverage the momentum and build on the profile the festival is gaining so they can continue to bring the finest jazz to Highworth.

Directly after this year's festival, Martin and Ray shared on socials:



Highworth Jazz Festival 2025
© Pete Wilson



'A huge THANK YOU from Highworth Jazz Festival! What an unforgettable Saturday! We're still feeling the energy and we want to extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to everyone who made it such a success.

To our brilliant musicians, your talent, passion and joy filled every corner of Highworth with rhythm and soul. A special tribute goes to the incredible women in jazz who we celebrated throughout the day - your performances were powerful, inspiring, and truly world-class.

To our fantastic volunteers, your dedication and energy kept the whole event running smoothly.

To the talented photographers who captured the spirit of the day we can't wait to see the photos - thank you for helping us remember the magic.





And of course, a massive thank you to the amazing local businesses, sponsors and Highworth Town Council whose generous support made the festival possible. Your belief in live music and community spirit is what brings this event to life.

And finally, to our wonderful audience - thank you for showing up, dancing, clapping, and sharing the joy of jazz with us all.

Here's to jazz, community, and the magic we make together. Until next time! Peace Love and Jazz.

Martin & Ray
Festival organisers"

[Click here for the Highworth Jazz Festival website](#)

Highworth Jazz festival 2025
© Pete Wilson

ALLEGRA LEVY

ALLEGRA LEVY AT KARAMEL CLUB, 11TH JULY 2025 by ISABEL MARQUEZ

Over a year ago, I had the pleasure of flying out to New York to work alongside the Women in Jazz Organisation (WIJO) to organise several events for the International Women's Day period. Meeting the incredible Allegra Levy was such a key encounter for me, particularly as I was living on my own in a new city, and she became a good friend in all the madness.

A year on, Allegra was making plans to come over to London and was keen to perform, which I saw as the perfect opportunity to unite these two huge parts of my life: being on the Women in Jazz Media Team and working with WIJO in New York.

Named one of the world's Top Ten Rising Stars among jazz vocalists by Downbeat magazine, she has been called everything from "sophisticated, worldly, and swinging" to "the new pin-up girl for cool." Her most recent album *Out of the Question*, her fifth from the legendary Danish jazz label SteepleChase Records, consists entirely of songs in search of answers, from Carole King's iconic "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?" to Levy's own bluesy take on the '80s punk rock classic, "Should I Stay or Should I Go?" by The Clash.

Accompanying her was Randy Ingram, a top jazz pianist on the New York scene, who has performed with leading musicians including John Patitucci, Jeff Tain Watts, Ari Hoenig, Ben Monder, Tierney Sutton, Ingrid Jensen, Kendrick Scott, and the late Billy Higgins.

Rounding out the band was Freddie Jensen, a London bassist who has played with Jean Toussaint, Kim Downes, and one of Levy's heroes, acclaimed artist Norma Winstone.

The gig was a dream; an intimate and special event, bringing two worlds together, supported by Karamel locals, family and friends, hugged by the heat of London's summer season. I was also interested in finding out more about Allegra's experience in London, and why she chose such an eclectic track list, from her early originals, Neil Young to The Beatles.



How has life been since the release of ‘Out of the Question’?

It has been exciting that the record received some good airplay and even made it onto the jazz charts this past spring. We did a few release shows while I was 8 months pregnant, and then one 3-months postpartum at Birdland. At one show I almost went into labor singing a high note! It’s been a challenging year around the world, and for us, especially now having two kiddos, but this trip to London has been really incredible.

How did it feel to bring a set of originals and covers to a London venue?

Even though I’ve played internationally, I’ve never played in London, despite it being near and dear to my heart and having many friends and family members in town. Because I’d never played here, I wanted to portray who I am as an artist and the scope across my albums. I chose selections from my most recent release, “Out of the Question” but also from the spring release of my moon album from 2018 - “Looking at the Moon” which is now out on vinyl. Then I wanted to show how I am, more than anything, a songwriter, so I picked mostly originals. I was introduced to “C.J.” by my mentor, friend, and colleague, John McNeil, who passed away last September. The lyrics I wrote are an irreverent rant about a certain politician who brings doom and gloom and incomprehensible despair. It felt like the right audience here for that.

How did you decide on the lineup for Karamel?

I asked my dear friend and incredible pianist Randy Ingram who has played at Ronnie Scott’s and other London clubs before, and he and Freddie Jensen, the London-based bassist have a mutual friend in NYC. I was also really excited to play with Freddie, since he’s played with Norma Winstone who is one of my heroes when it comes to jazz lyrics.

What future projects and performances have you got lined up?

I’m working on another album of all originals, and a follow up album to my jazz for kid’s project- “Songs for you and Me” which I’m hoping to tour stateside this spring.

Also to add - I was really excited for Women in Jazz org to collaborate with Women in Jazz Media and hope we find more ways to collaborate in the future- maybe a New York meets London Women project will happen!

[Click here to visit Allegra’s website](#)



Photo by by James Corder



FROM THE HEART OF THE MOTHER CITY: THEMBI DUNJANA ON CRAFTING A GLOBAL SOUND

BY SHIREEN FISHER

For an artist, there is no stage quite like the one at home. At the Cape Town International Jazz Festival (CTIJF), this sentiment rang true for Thembelihle (Thembi) Dunjana. For the talented pianist and vocalist, performing on one of the world's most prestigious Jazz stages was magnified by the fact that it was right in her own city.

"To be honest, because I'm from Cape Town, it's the biggest honour for me," Thembi shared with a warm smile. "Playing at home is always very special, so the fact that it's a big festival and it's at home is primarily why I'm so excited to play." While she has performed at international festivals, the personal significance of this moment was not lost on her. "The fact that it's at home is very important for me. I do appreciate that for sure."

Music wasn't a sudden career choice for Thembi, but rather a "natural progression." Her journey began not with a piano, but with a recorder. While practicing, she grew curious about the instrument accompanying her. "So my teacher was playing accompaniments, and I was like, I'm just reading one line, and she's playing all these chords and stuff," she recalled. "I was like, 'Man, I dig that vibe, I wanna play more than one line, I wanna play chords, they are so lush and beautiful.'"

This early curiosity led to a pivotal request to her parents for piano lessons. Her mother got her a small Casio keyboard, and before she even started lessons, Thembi was busy "just kind of figuring the notes out." It was a sign of the dedication that would come to define her path, one that would lead her to study Jazz at

the University of Cape Town (UCT) and, eventually, put her on the world stage.

Thembi's musical philosophy is shaped by a deep reverence for Jazz masters like John Coltrane and Bheki Mseleku. What she most admires is their fundamental mastery and the hard work that went into their craft. "One thing about music is that it sounds beautiful, but a lot of practice goes behind it. That is one of the things that I look up to them for."

She also found herself drawn to their distinct styles. Coltrane's sound possesses a beautiful, "Afro-diasporic" quality, while Mseleku had a beautiful way of "merging American Jazz with South African sounds." It is this ability to fuse different traditions that defines Thembi's own artistry.

She views Jazz not just as a genre, but as a "harmonic language," which she sees as the very reason it is so adaptable. This approach gives her the creative freedom to seamlessly blend traditional sounds with contemporary elements like neo-soul and beyond. "You can use the harmony of Jazz to compose in whatever way," she explained, making it easy to incorporate other genres.

Fresh out of university with a trove of compositions, Thembi made a bold move for her debut: a double album entitled Intyatyambo. "I just had a lot of music at the time," she said. "And to me, as young as I was, I didn't see why not to put it all out." The unconventional choice set her apart and quickly garnered industry attention.

This ambition was rewarded in 2021 when Thembi won two Mzantsi Jazz Awards, including the prestigious Best Female in Jazz. The recognition was a key that unlocked a new world of opportunity. The award led to a crucial connection with Seton Hawkins, the Director of Public Programs at Jazz at Lincoln Centre, which paved the way for her to perform at Dizzy's Club in New York City.

The experience was transformative. “That award and the main connection it had, was for me to be able to travel abroad,” she said. But the journey didn't end there. The New York performance led to an even bigger milestone: recording her second album in the city. Thembi's sophomore effort, 'God Bless iKapa. God Bless Mzantsi', was a beautiful collaboration with American and South African musicians, including Tim Norton on double bass, Jerome Jennings on drums, Zoe Obadia on alto sax, and fellow South African Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year winner, Siya Charles on trombone. The creative process, she said, was “so easy” because of the deep rhythmic and melodic commonalities between the two Jazz traditions.

As both a pianist and a vocalist, Thembi often faces an industry assumption about her primary role. “It's crazy because, I guess, especially because I'm a female, it's easily categorised that I'm a vocalist,” she noted. “But I'm not really a vocalist like that. I'm actually a pianist first.” She explained that while she sings her own music, the piano has always been her main artistic vehicle, and she's never had any formal vocal training.

Looking ahead, Thembi is working on a new album, which she'll be recording in New York in November. It's an exciting collaboration with a vibraphone player from the city. She will also be heading to Basel, Switzerland, for a residency.

Thembi's advice to young, aspiring artists, particularly young women, is simple and profound. “Practice,” she said. “Whatever you do, just really take care of it, really, really, just put in the work, and everything else will work itself out.” For her, the foundation of any successful career you know, it's kind of worthless.”

Her message to her fans is equally heartfelt: “I love you guys. Thank you for your support, and the only thing I want to do is play good music for you.” It's a promise Thembi Dunjana continues to deliver on, from the stages of her hometown to the world.

[Click here to visit Thembi's Instagram](#)



A black and white photograph of a woman with long, curly, light-colored hair, singing passionately into a microphone. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, top with a dark, patterned necklace. The background is dark and out of focus.

BEHIND THE LENS THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

ENID FARBER

[Visit Enid's website here](#)

Vision Festival 2025, Roulette, Brooklyn, NY
Lisa Sokolov on Vocals



Melanie Dyer on Violin

Vision Festival 2025,
Roulette, Brooklyn, NY

My yearly photo festival shoot, where the best of the category known as “free jazz”, or “improvisational music” or “avant-garde jazz music” was a feat for me as it was the first full shoot I had done since breaking my foot on January 6th, 2025. With a cane in one hand and a camera in the other, I could only make two nights out of a six night festival, and luckily some very prolific women were performing and dancing those nights. The festival always includes dance, as one of the founders, Patricia-Nicolson Parker, is a dancer when she’s not planning and executing the festival and many other events throughout the the year featuring the great and masterful musicians of the genre.



Mary Halvorson on Acoustic
Guitar



Ava Mendoza
on Electric Guitar
and Vocals

Cassandra Wilson at Bethany Baptist Church in Newark, NJ
On a Saturday evening in Newark,
the inimitable Cassandra Wilson's trio including
bassist Lonnie Plaxico and guitarist Marvin Sewell performed for
Dorthann Kirk's Jazz Vespers series.

Dorthaan (known as DK to her friends and associates), has had a
special bond with Cassandra for most of her career. For the great singer to per-
form at this historic church and series, is a testament to Dorthaan's legend and
her own career, bringing the finest jazz
musicians to various venues and for many special events in
Newark and New York and beyond!





INTERVIEW WITH ROMY SUMMERS OF UK JAZZ NEWS: Giving musicians a voice in the jazz press and spreading awareness of good music

BY KIM CYPHER

Being an independent artist in the music business is a continuous learning curve. Over the years I have gained much knowledge and experience on how to survive in a world where the musician has an ever-increasing number of roles to play. One of the most crucial lessons I have learnt is understanding and accepting that you cannot do EVERYTHING yourself. Survival depends on one very crucial component – making good professional connections and having a reliable team you can trust to undertake some of these roles for you.

It can be quite a daunting journey finding out who the right people are for you, especially if you are used to working independently and you know how you want things to be done. It is also likely you will be let down and disappointed along the way. But once you find the right people for your team, you realise they are worth their weight in gold.

One of my 'go to' reliable connections is UK Jazz News, founded in 2009 by fellow saxophonist Sebastian Scotney. UK Jazz News, formerly London Jazz News evolved from a blog which went from strength to strength offering in-depth jazz coverage via the UK Jazz News website, newsletters and socials. With a genuine enthusiasm for jazz and related music, together with a substantial team of contributors and helpers, UK Jazz News gives musicians a voice in the jazz press.

Over the years I have corresponded with editor and publisher Sebastian and other members of the UK Jazz News team. I have always found them to be extremely helpful, supportive and efficient. A key member of the team is advertising manager Romy Summers who I have built a longstanding relationship with, communicating

regularly regarding my ongoing music projects. Romy is an experienced music marketer, and her support and efficiency is second to none.

Having a long history with Romy, often corresponding in depth (sometimes late at night or during weekends), I found myself curious as to her background and to her interest in supporting jazz musicians. Over the years Romy will have undoubtedly gained much information about me and my music. Now I turn the focus onto Romy and UK Jazz News to find out more about who is behind this vital support network.

Kim - Why did you choose to promote jazz as opposed to other genres?

Romy - "I have always loved jazz from a young age as the music was around me growing up. My mother is a former jazz singer who had everything - the voice, the looks, the song-writing ability, but alas gave it up. She always sang to me around the house which I loved. We still sing and dance now wherever we are, the aisles of Morrisons you name it and my hero late father's father who I never got to know, was a clarinet player, so there was jazz on both sides."

Kim - How long have you been working at UK Jazz News and what inspired you to join the team?

Romy - "About 10 years or so now. Sebastian and I first met at Brunel University in the Big Band, and we stayed in touch over the years. I worked with him briefly on the 'Way Out West' promotions (programming jazz in West London) and then later when I was at Cadogan Hall, I'd place advertising with him for the 'Out to Lunch Series' (which I am now back working



Photo by Monika S Jakubowska



Romy - “It is important to give them a platform, to be heard and encourage them to pursue their passions. We need live music, and musicians need places to play, audiences to hear them, so they can learn and grow as musicians. If they are doing it on their own, without a label or big budget behind them, then good for them and they deserve support.”

Kim - Tell me about your personal tastes in music and what is your all-time favourite album?

Romy - “I love everything from jazz and blues to country, rock and rap! Too many to name so I won't mention an album if that is OK, but I will say that Don McClean's American Pie is one of my all-time favourite songs, alongside his song Vincent. Two stunning songs that make me feel like I am back sitting with my dad who loved these too. The lyrics in both songs are just stunning.”

Kim - Do you or any other members of the UK Jazz News team play any musical instruments?

Romy - “Oh yes, my boss plays saxophone, another colleague plays piano and violin, I'm sure some of the others do too. I did classical piano growing up and got to my grade 8 which was my aim when I started at the age of 7. Then at university I changed to jazz piano and learnt under the terrific tuition of Mike Gorman who was just fabulous. I came out of my lessons with my brain pleasantly frazzled from all the jazz theory, but I loved it! I combined that with singing and was completely inspired by Diana Krall and Liane Carroll.

I play a smattering of guitar and, as my eldest is learning rock guitar, we sometimes jam and actually we just wrote a song together. Turns out all I was missing to complete a song was my daughter.”

Kim - How often do you manage to get to live gigs and what’s been the best gig you’ve ever been to?

Romy - “I get invited to a lot but probably get to a few a month.

Best gig, tricky one but I would have to say Ray Charles at the Montreal Jazz Festival many moons ago. I was so thrilled to watch this legend. Just terrific!”

Kim - What interests do you have outside of your work?

Romy - “I love jamming with my kids and collaborating on cartoons with them. One day we may put together a book of all our ideas and animations. I also enjoy playing tennis.”

Kim - What part does AI play in the work you do?

Romy - “Oh I am a young dinosaur when it comes to this. I hate AI, I really do. It scares me that so many things are becoming redundant due to this, and people no longer need to think for themselves anymore. It has not had an impact on my work yet fortuitously!”

Kim - What’s the biggest piece of advice you can give to musicians to help you market them well?

Romy - “Create a story, perhaps for any gigs they're doing. I think the audience appreciate following a story when watching a gig. It turns it into a show with dialogue and anecdotes and breaks things up between pieces.

Also, even if you rally against it, Instagram /social media, is a powerful tool these days and videos of rehearsals and gigs really help boost promotion. So, a presence on all these is crucial.”

Kim - If you could choose to have VIP tickets to a show by any music artist, who would you choose and why?

Romy - “Stevie Wonder. I have always wanted to see him live and the dream concert in 2010 where he headlined and Jamiroquai was playing too, I almost booked tickets but then realised we were due to be at our friend’s wedding in Ischia. When I told my friend about the gig, he quipped “I need to change the wedding date, as that will be an epic gig!” The Ischia wedding was incredible.”

I really enjoyed chatting to Romy and finding out more about her background and life. There’s some great advice there too for independent musicians. From a personal perspective, I am very grateful to Romy and UK Jazz News for all the support they have given me over the years and for being an ongoing part of my ‘go to’ team. They are approachable, affordable and reliable, providing opportunities to get music out to a wider audience and enabling musicians to have their voices heard. Plus, they are lovely people and they just get it!

Inspiration: Liane Carroll by Tatiana Gorilovsky

Keep up the great work Romy, Sebastian and all at UK Jazz News!

[UK Jazz News Website](#)

[Cadogan Hall 'Out to Lunch' Jazz Series 2025 programme](#)



Having interviewed some amazing female artists, I started to notice that - besides highlighting their works and wanting to know more about them and their latest news - I was curious to hear from them about specific topics.

Most of all, I was happy (and feeling refreshed!) about the fact that none of them avoided answering some controversial questions but were very honest and straightforward talking about important topics, such as daily challenges for women in the music/art business, mental health and all those hot issues that we should really talk more about.

We're all living common struggles – from the draining social media management to the non-stop-multitasking work of musicians in general – and I truly believe that if we all acknowledge and share these issues, we can feel less lonely, to finally breathe the sense of a community that we often don't feel part of.

That's why I've created this column: not only to celebrate the successes and careers of some fabulous women but also give them a safe space to talk freely about whatever they'd like to discuss or raise their voice about (by choosing the questions that they want to answer to - hence the repetition of some, for different artists).

I hope this will inspire you, as the artists who I'm interviewing are inspiring me!

Germana

TALKING STRAIGHT! WITH GERMANA STELLA LA SORSA



Photo by Monika S
Jakubowska

BETTY ACCORSI

When I first listened to the music of award winning Italian-born saxophone player Betty Accorsi, it was clear to me that there it was more than just beautiful pieces written in a very clever way.

These have already been appreciated by the audiences at acclaimed jazz clubs and festivals, including The Pheasantry, The Verdict, EFG London Jazz Festival and Sidmouth Jazz Festival, but with a new release round the corner, Betty is ready to take over outside the UK.

In her compositions, you can hear all her musical influences (from John Surman to Pat Metheny, with echoes of Dvorak, Bartok, Debussy and Western European folk, to quote her bio) and still appreciating the uniqueness and richness of tunes that have a lot to say.

Regarding her upcoming release “Nature Prints”, Betty says: “From nature comes art, from art comes nature. I keep discovering both in every fragment of my daily life, and the lives of others. This album is dedicated to this concept.”

I already wrote about her second album “Growing Roots” (2022, funded by the Help Musicians MOBO award) and knew about her debut work “Cutty Sark Suite” (2020) and learned that beyond her tunes there's a deep connection with nature. But in the new album, her lyricism reaches an unprecedented level. And this arises from the pen of a sensitive composer who is not only capable of telling stories but also what's behind them, through her writing

and her voices...both on saxophone and – to the pleasant surprise of a fellow singer – her singing one.

“Nature Prints” will be presented at Toulouse Lautrec in London on the 24th of July, before Betty takes flight to various UK festivals, including the Petersfield Jazz Festival. And I just can't wait to see her on the road more and more.

GSLs: Who inspired you the most at the beginning of your career and why?

At the beginning of my career, I listened to a lot of classical music—particularly Dvořák—because I loved the folk influences in his compositions. Later, when I started studying jazz, I fell in love with Chet Baker for his strong lyricism and the fact that he both played the trumpet and sang, which was something I aspired to do myself with the sax. Thanks to my saxophone teacher, I was then introduced to Wayne Shorter. Discovering his music was eye-opening for me, as he managed to blend jazz with the structural sensibilities of classical music—exactly the kind of artistic synthesis I was drawn to.

GSLs: Who are your biggest female role models and why?

When I was a teenager, I loved Patti Smith and Joan Baez. Later, I became fascinated by Sinéad O'Connor and Ella Fitzgerald. What they all have in common, for me, is their beautiful and unique voices, their storytelling approach

Photo by Justyna Neryng

to music, and their rebellious spirit—each of them challenged conventions in their own way and spoke deeply to the times they lived in.

GSLS: Is there anything or anyone that had a particular impact on your career or music?

Yes, several people have had a profound impact on my journey. My Italian saxophone teacher, Ausonio Calò, gave me a deep passion for Wayne Shorter and introduced me to the beauty of the soprano saxophone. My friend and guitarist Stefano De Marchi (Psicosuono, Libera Phonocratia) sparked my love for fusion music—like Chick Corea, Jaco Pastorius, and Weather Report—and encouraged me to cross musical boundaries, always staying original and creative. And my husband, Andrea Martelloni (Sloth In The City, HITar), has been a huge support—he believed in me and my music even in the moments when I didn’t believe in myself.

GSLS: What do you consider your biggest achievements in life and what are you most proud of in your career as a woman in the music business?

I’m proud of being a sensitive and honest musician and composer—someone who stays connected to both the inner world and the world around me, always with the intention of telling stories through music. One of my biggest achievements is having released three albums of entirely original material. I’m also proud to have contributed, in my own small way, to the music world and the UK jazz scene as a female artist.

GSLS: Are there any gigs or recording sessions that you cherish the most and why?

I’ve loved all the gigs I’ve played at festivals—they’re special because you get to meet so many different people, and there’s always such a joyful and open atmosphere. I also really cherished the recording sessions for my third album. It felt like we were all fully committed, working hard to bring originality and creativity to the music. I hope that listeners will be able to feel that energy and passion

when they hear it.

GSLS: Tell us about your latest release, “Nature Prints”. Where does the inspiration for the music come from? Is there a specific message that you wish to share with it?

My latest album, “Nature Prints”, explores the relationship between art and nature. I drew inspiration from a variety of fields—from poetry by Shakespeare and Mary Oliver, to sculpture like the Lewis chess set, and even gardening. I was fascinated by how humans interpret nature and transform it into art. Through this album, my message is to encourage listeners to reconnect with nature—the source from which we all come—in order to feel more grounded and in touch with themselves.

GSLS: Who are the musicians involved in your project and how did your collaboration begin?

My project features three fantastic musicians who are also dear friends: Dan Hewson on piano and trombone, Andy Hamill on electric and double bass, and Joe Edwards on drums. They are all very special both as human beings and as musicians, sharing my sensitivity and artistic approach. I’ve recorded three albums with Andy, two with Dan, and the most recent one with Joe.

GSLS: Are there any tracks on your album(s) that are particularly dear to you and why?

I love “Into The Forest” because it has a magical quality—I always invite listeners to close their eyes and fully immerse themselves in it. I also have a special connection to Carillon, which is sung in Italian and is a very sweet, heartfelt song.

GSLS: What do you think are the main issues for musicians at the moment, and in particular for women in the business? How do you cope with these and what can be actually done – on a practical level – to sort these issues?

One of the main challenges for musicians today is the limited funding available for the arts, which can make it harder to sustain a career, especially for those creating music outside the mainstream. While the music industry naturally follows market dynamics, it’s important to find ways to support diverse and original voices. For many artists, balancing multiple roles is necessary, but it’s also a chance to develop new skills and creative approaches. As a woman in the industry, I try to focus on resilience, community, and collaboration—finding support among peers and organizations that value originality. Practically, increasing access to grants, creating mentorship programs, and building stronger networks can make a real difference. I believe that by working together and advocating for broader support, we can help ensure that music and art remain accessible to everyone, allowing all voices to be heard regardless of background.

GSLS: How do you deal with preconceptions of genre?

I believe that today the meaning of jazz is very broad and inclusive. Instead of limiting ourselves with strict categories, it’s important to embrace that openness and allow the music to evolve naturally. This way, we can focus more on expression and creativity rather than fitting into predefined genres.

GSLS: Which advice would you give to someone who worries about stereotypes and labels or to someone who is struggling to take the steps forward towards what they really want to do and/or be?

I think it’s important not to get stuck trying to fit into stereotypes or labels. Instead, focus on finding your own voice and the audience that connects with what you do. It might take time, but when you find your people, your work will have meaning and impact.





GSLS: In a music industry that is constantly changing, what advice would you give to the new generation of musicians and performers and which lessons would you share with someone who wants to undertake a musical path as a professional?

I think that It's a great time to explore different styles, technologies, and ways of connecting with audiences worldwide. Stay curious, be open to learning, and trust your unique voice.

GSLS: We hear a lot about artists struggling to keep up with a music industry that is increasingly demanding. Nowadays, it seems like artists feel more and more obliged to constantly create content and new 'products' - even if this often impacts their wellbeing - in order not to 'disappear' or for the fear of feeling like a failure and being forgotten. What do you think about this?

I believe it's important for artists to stand together and remember that our music and art have intrinsic value, regardless of commercial success. What we create is our unique voice, and when we feel the

urge to share something meaningful, we have the right—and the responsibility—to express it.

GSLS: How do you take care of yourself? Do you take breaks from social media? What would you recommend to balance life outside work and being an artist?

I've found that mindfulness, swimming, and walks really help me maintain my mental health and stay grounded. Taking breaks from social media is important too, as it allows me to reconnect with myself and my creativity. I would also recommend not facing challenges alone—community matters a lot. We're all in this together, and organizations like Women in Jazz Media do amazing work supporting artists and fostering connection.

GSLS: Is there a specific matter that you think we should talk more about? What would you suggest to sort it/ improve the situation?

I believe it's important for us to advocate more strongly for increased government funding for art, culture, and music. By coming together to share ideas and create clear proposals, we can help the sector grow and thrive once again. Supporting the arts is essential to keeping creativity alive and accessible for everyone in our country.

GSLS: What's on your 'bucket list', what are your dreams at this very moment and what are your next steps?

Right now, I dream of touring the UK and Europe with my quartet, BAQ, sharing our music with new audiences. After that, I want to focus more on composition—specifically creating orchestral works that blend jazz with my classical and folk influences. I would also like to start composing for films, exploring new ways to tell stories

through music.

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Photos by Justyna Neryng





BEA ASURMENDI

Photos by Ione Saizar

To talk about Bea Asurmendi and her music, I really have to go beyond her bio or press kit.

Because, although the background of this incredible Basque London-based vocalist and composer is outstanding – including performances in some of London's most renowned theatres and venues such as Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club and Pizza Express Jazz Club, opening for drummer Ari Hoenig at Milton Court Concert Hall at the EFG London Jazz Festival 2023 and a collaboration with with composer and director Fernando Velázquez, now nominated for the Goya Awards 2025 for Best Original Song with "Show Me" (from the movie Buffalo Kids), which features Bea as lead vocalist- what matters the most is that what she creates really comes from somewhere deeper.

Her latest release and debut album, “Asteartea” (“Tuesday” in Basque, from Bea's experience in a Women's Circle that impacted her life and music, that met weekly on that day) is a mix of contemporary jazz, Iberian folk and improvisation where the singer's melting-pot of musical influences merge: from flamenco music to latin America folk, and from the music of Sílvia Pérez Cruz to the inspiring sounds of Norma Winstone and Brigitte Beraha - singers who shape her vocal tone.

On the album (released first on Bandcamp on the 27th of May of this year and has been available worldwide since June 27th), Bea sings meaningful lyrics in Basque, Spanish, and English, talking about self-love, empowerment, grief and – my favourite – self-forgiveness. But you don't really need to speak all of these languages to understand their meaning. Bea's essence lies in every single musical moment of this stunning album. Her voice is sincere and honest in a disarming way: strong and pure at the same time, it flows gracefully and reverberantly on deep harmonic cushions. “Asteartea” is simply mesmerising. A real journey for your soul.

GSLS: Who inspired you the most at the beginning of your career and why?

I feel like moving to London was what truly inspired me. It wasn't so much a single person, but rather the city itself—the people I met, the energy, the rich diversity, and the sense of possibility. I came from a much smaller place, the Basque Country, where I didn't have close references around me of people who had pursued a career in music. So arriving in London and suddenly being surrounded by musicians from all over the world, each with their own story and sound, was incredibly inspiring. It made me feel like anything was possible and gave me the courage to take my music seriously. London challenged me to grow—not just as an artist, but as a person. It pushed me out of my comfort zone and helped me find my voice.

GSLS: Who are your biggest female role models and why?

In life, I'd say my mum. She's one of the strongest women I know and has always encouraged my sisters and me to stay positive, follow our dreams, and carve out our own paths. In music, I've found role models in the women around me—friends, collaborators, artists I've met along the way—who are doing things on their own terms. Seeing women build their careers with integrity and creativity has been incredibly empowering.

GSLS: Is there anything or anyone that had a particular impact on your career or music?

At home, there was always music playing. My dad listened to a lot of rock bands, my mum to folk singer-songwriters, and at the same time I was studying classical singing while being completely obsessed with voices like Whitney Houston's. Later on, I discovered the jazz universe. So from early on, I was surrounded by very different musical worlds—which is something I really value. I believe that kind of openness and curiosity can only enrich your music. I'd also like to mention Sara Dowling, Clare Wheeler, and Brigitte Beraha—three of the best teachers I've ever had. Not just be-





cause of their outstanding musicianship and voices, but because they were so much more than teachers. They believed in me, challenged me, inspired me, listened, and held space for me to explore who I was as an artist. Their lessons felt like therapy! Their impact has stayed with me, both musically and personally.

GSLS: What do you consider your biggest achievements in life and what are you most proud of in your career as a woman in the music business?

One of the things I'm most proud of is releasing my debut album "Asteartea" as a completely independent artist. I managed the entire project on my own. It was a huge challenge, but also an incredibly empowering experience. Knowing that the final result is a true reflection of my artistic vision and dedication means the world to me. I also often think about the younger Bea who left a small village in the mountains of the Basque Country twelve years ago to move to London, completely on her own—without knowing anyone who had taken a similar path or could serve as a reference. Just a dream that felt enormous at the time. That courage—that leap into the unknown—is something I hold close. It reminds me how far I've come, not only in my career, but as a person too.

GSLS: Are there any gigs or recording sessions that you cherish the most and why?

Definitely the physical album launch concert on 27th May at St John's Hoxton in London. It was such a special night—so many of my London friends came, and I got to share the bill with my dear friend and incredible artist Judit Neddermann, along with the phenomenal Pau Figueres, as they presented their own album too. I'd been an admirer of their music for years, even before we knew each other personally and became friends, so sharing the night with them truly felt like a gift. The venue had such a unique atmosphere, and the energy in the room was magical. It felt like a real celebration of music and friendship. I'll never forget that night.

GSLS: Tell us about your latest release, "Asteartea". Where does the inspiration for the music come from? Is there a specific message that you wish to share with it?

"Asteartea" was inspired by a deeply transformative experience I had in a women's circle that met every Tuesday—hence the album's name, which means "Tuesday" in Basque. In that safe space, goddess mythology became a gateway to exploring our inner landscapes and the shared stories of womanhood. We spoke freely—about anger, joy, fears, dreams, sorrow, and desire—expressing everything openly and honestly. That experience helped me realise how universal many of our feelings and experiences are, how interconnected we are as women, and how much we can learn from each other through sharing and support. The album is an evocative, multilingual journey through grief, self-forgiveness, self-love, empowerment, and mental health. It invites listeners to find strength in softness and beauty in vulnerability—qualities so often overlooked or undervalued by society—and to honour their emotional journey. To feel deeply, embrace their inner process, and express themselves freely.

GSLS: Are there any tracks on your album(s) that are particularly dear to you and why?

It's difficult to pick just one, but OTSE-MEAK—which means "she-wolves" in Basque—feels especially close to my heart. It's the opening track of the album and sets the tone for everything that follows. In a way, it acts like an opening mantra, encapsulating the spirit of the whole project. The piece begins with the voices of the women in my family. We recorded it during a special gathering last year at my grandparents' house in the mountains. I brought my mic and gear, and we stood together in a circle to capture that moment. Hearing their voices at the start of the album anchors the music in something very intimate and real—my roots, the strength of intergenerational bonds, and the beauty of connection and vulnerability among women.

GSLs: What do you think are the main issues for musicians at the moment, and in particular for women in the business? How do you cope with these and what can be actually done – on a practical level – to sort these issues?

One of the biggest challenges for musicians today is the pressure to stay constantly visible and productive—posting content, growing an audience, staying "relevant"—often at the expense of the creative process. The industry rewards speed and quantity over depth and integrity, which makes it especially difficult when you're trying to create honest, meaningful work. Many of us also juggle multiple roles—manager, booker, PR, social media—which is overwhelming and unsustainable. For women, these pressures are often amplified. There's still a lack of representation in areas like production, sound engineering, and festival programming, and gender bias continues to shape how we're perceived. We're often expected to conform to certain aesthetics or justify our presence in spaces we've worked hard to earn. What helps me is working with people who truly support and respect my vision, and being part of a community that nurtures and uplifts. On a practical level, we need more women and non-binary people in leadership, mentorship and education that prioritise access and empowerment, and platforms that amplify underrepresented voices. Most importantly, we need to shift the focus from constant output to authenticity and long-term artistic development.

GSLs: In a music industry that is constantly changing, what advice would you give to the new generation of musicians and performers and which lessons would you share with someone who wants to undertake a musical path as a professional?

My advice would be to trust your own process and honour your own pace. It's easy to get swept up in the constant rush, pressure, and so-called 'right' way of doing things that often comes with today's music industry. But putting your art—your music—first is essential. I've also come to understand how important it is to surround yourself with people who gen-

uinely connect with your vision, who support and encourage you, and who bring real heart to the work. When it comes to stereotypes and labels, I'd say: stay true to your voice. Genre is just a frame—what really matters is the story you're telling and how honestly you choose to tell it.

GSLs: How do you take care of yourself? Do you take breaks from social media? What would you recommend to balance life outside work and being an artist?

I love spending time in nature—especially hiking. That's actually one of the main reasons I make a point to fly back to the Basque Country every month or so. Being surrounded by the mountains and the quiet helps me reset and reconnect with myself, so I can return to my music with fresh energy. I do take breaks from social media when I feel it's necessary, especially when it starts to feel overwhelming—but it's not always easy, particularly during intense periods like an album release, when there's so much pressure to stay visible and keep the momentum going. I've learned that stepping back, even briefly, helps protect both my mental health and creativity.

GSLs: Is there a specific matter that you think we should talk more about? What would you suggest to sort it/ improve the situation?

I think we need to talk more about mental health in music education. Music conservatoires and institutions tend to place a lot of emphasis on discipline, performance, and technical excellence, but often overlook the emotional and psychological toll that comes with that pressure. Many students carry the weight of perfectionism, constant self-comparison, fear of failure, and burnout—yet there's very little space in the system to acknowledge or process any of it. I truly believe mental health should be treated with the same importance as harmony, technique, or repertoire. Professors—especially those in direct, ongoing contact with students—should receive training in mental health awareness so they can better support the emotional needs of young musicians. At the same time, mental health



helping students develop tools for self-care, resilience, and emotional balance. It's not just about preventing crisis; it's about cultivating healthier, more sustainable careers and relationships with music. If we want artists to thrive—not just survive—we need to create learning environments that prioritise both artistic growth and human well-being.

GSLs: What's on your 'bucket list', what are your dreams at this very moment and what are your next steps?

At the moment, my biggest aim is to bring "Asteartea" to life on stage and share it with people through live performances. Performing is at the core of why I make music—it's where I feel most alive and most connected to others. There's something incredibly powerful about witnessing how the songs resonate in real time, how they open space for emotion, reflection, and shared energy. That kind of exchange is unique and irreplaceable. I'm

currently in the process of confirming a series of shows for this autumn and beyond, and I'll be sharing the dates soon on my website and social media.

Photos by Lone Saizar

[Click here to visit Bea's website](#)

Photo by Jeff Banks



The Independent Artist

BY PAULETTE JACKSON

I have always been an advocate of the arts: music, dance, theatre, art, etc. and in recent years with the music industry changing so much, including the immersion of independent artists, this has become even greater.

It has become increasingly important for artists to take charge of their works without the interference of “corporate influence”. I myself, becoming a published author, wanted to self-publish because it was important for me to own my works and have complete creative control and with that, have been able to consult other up-and-coming writers. From my experiences in the music and media industry, I have been blessed to be able to inspire other creatives on their artistic journeys, on my terms.

Of course, every artist starting out has to choose the path that is best for them in order to get to their specific goals. But, I believe that seasoned and newer artists and creatives, feel the need more and more, to call their own shots. Now, I am not saying you don’t need a strong team behind you but it will be a group of people and resources you choose to fit your vision and goals to your creative and artistic journey.

The independent artist has become their own PR, booking agent, stylist, make-up artist, web creator, road manager and record company, just to name a few. It may be harder work, but worth it when you can control the narrative of your brand, instead of someone else telling you who YOU are as a creative. This is our time to shine and show what we are made of.

I believe that women who are independent artists have to work twice as hard as their male counterparts just because they are women, which I have always felt is unfair, but we will save that for another time. We are smart, resilient, brilliant and passionate about what we create and that passion, I believe, is what makes us that much greater (no offense to the wonderful guys out there).

I respect the grind of the independent artists both women & men, and the long, hard journey it takes to the better parts of themselves they were yesterday. With each painting, concert, recording, graphic design and writing we grow, we learn and we share our experiences with other artists who are starting out on this road of independent expression. Now go and be your creative self!

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support Paulette please [click here](#)

NEW RELEASES



Rikette by Tatiana Gorilovsky



INEZA

Ibuka is Ineza’s debut album as a leader, released on 12 September. Meaning ‘remember’ in Kinyarwanda (a Bantu language and the national language of Rwanda), its title encapsulates the spirit of the album. It tells Ineza’s personal story through a collection of 8 songs.

Born in Rwanda, raised in Belgium, based in London, Ineza is a true jazz vocalist with a remarkably distinct voice. With impeccably articulated vocals, she moves effortlessly between contemporary jazz and soul, blending elegant sophistication with raw vocal power. As a composer, she brings her own artistry to the genre, fusing jazz’s inventive freedom with the depth and richness of soul.

Releasing Sept 12th.

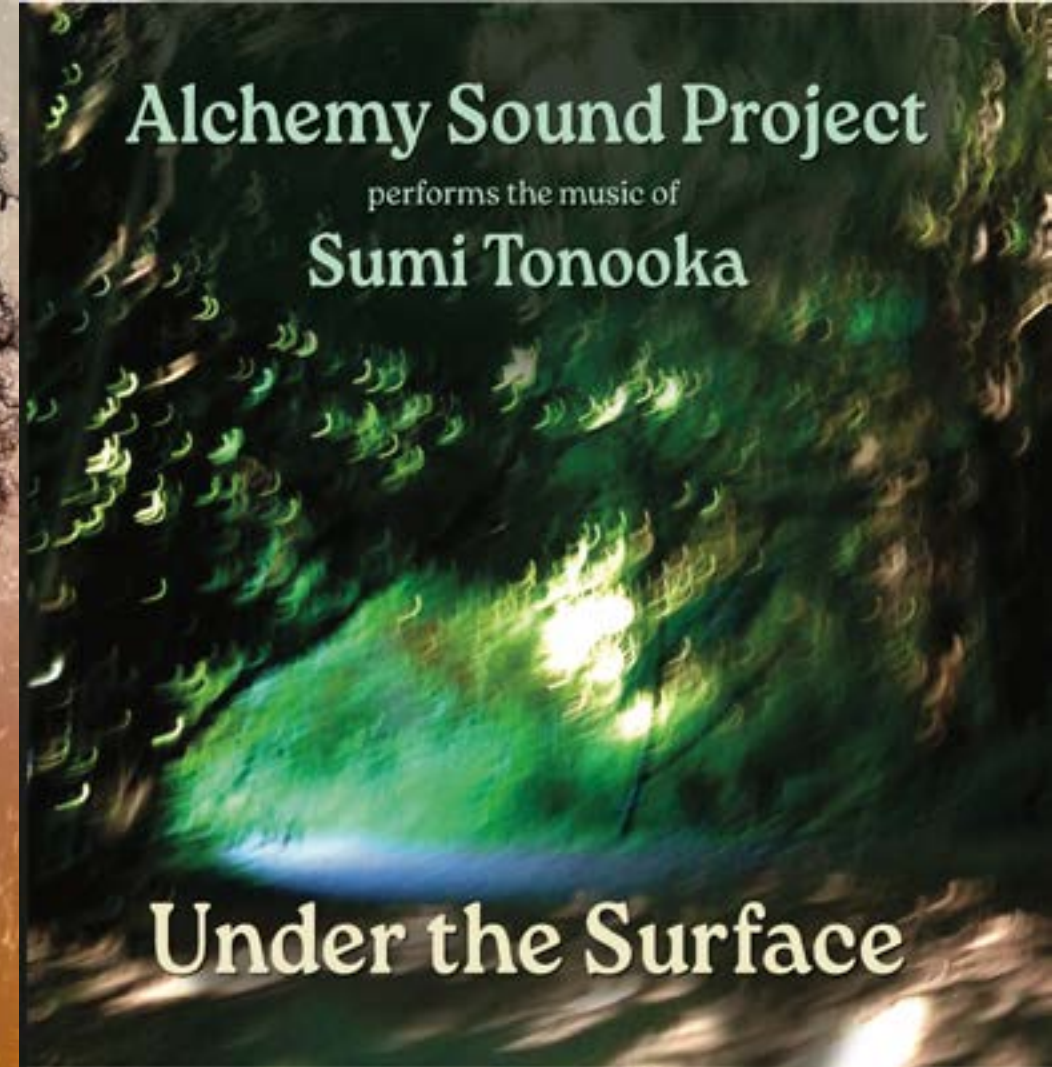


BRANDEE YOUNGER

Gadabout Season, Younger’s third for the legendary Impulse! label, releasing June 13, 2025, is her most personal and exploratory album to date – a reflective, imaginative body of work on which she has written or co-written nearly every composition. “The album reflects the journey – the search for meaning and beauty amid life’s most complex moments, ultimately emerging with a deeper sense of self,” says Younger. “Musically Gadabout Season is more creative and slightly more cerebral than my other works.”

Known for her revelatory interpretations of harp legends Alice Coltrane and Dorothy Ashby, Younger now steps boldly into her own compositional voice, crafting music that carries her forebears’ language forward without paying direct tribute. .

Released June 13th



SUMI TONOOKA

Pianist/composer Sumi Tonooka reveals the secret world of trees and the underground connections that bind society in the breathtaking suite Under the Surface, a Chamber Music America New Jazz Works commission, available June 27 via ARC. Album features Tonooka’s trio with Gregg August and Johnathan Blake plus Alchemy Sound Project.

Sumi Tonooka looks for the submerged truths and unseen networks that nourish our world. The renowned Philadelphia composer and pianist has been most visible in recent years writing commissions for symphony orchestras and crafting new works for her trio. With Under the Surface, out June 27, 2025 via ARC, various Tonookian worlds converge in an extended work that embodies the interlaced web of connections that manifest beneath our feet and on neighborhood bandstands.

Released June 27th



SHUTEEN ERDENEBAATAR

Motéma Music is pleased to announce *Under the Same Stars*, a captivating jazz-meets-classical duo album by Berlin-based rising jazz stars Shuteen Erdenebaatar and Nils Kugelmann.

Releasing Sept 12th.

Following her internationally acclaimed and multi-award-winning 2023 debut *Rising Sun*, Mongolian-born piano star Erdenebaatar surprises again on this exquisite duo with acclaimed ACT artist Nils Kugelmann on contra-alto clarinet and upright bass. As partners in life and in sound, Kugelmann and Erdenebaatar draw here on their shared love of jazz, classical, and cinematic music to create a poetic and thrilling musical adventure to stir the soul and moods as *Mäensivu* explores the ever-salient topic of what it means to belong.



JAMILE

Cellar Music Group is proud to announce the September 12, 2025 release of *Pursuit of a Pulse*, the third album by New York-based, Brazilian-born vocalist and composer Jamile.

Releasing Sept 12th

Pursuit of a Pulse encapsulates the endless quest for music that makes one's heart race—the ceaseless life-affirming pulse that emerges when music seeps deep into one's pores. Reverencing composers that are still alive and/or have been pivotal innovators of their times, Jamile invokes both the heartbeat of those still with us, and the ancestral pulse that provides guidance, making a clear statement that the jazz art form lives on through the footsteps of those who choose to walk along its path and carve new trails.



LAUREN HENDERSON

Brontosaurus Records announces the August 1, 2025 release of *Sonidos*, the latest album from award-winning vocalist Lauren Henderson.

Releasing August 1st

This carefully curated collection represents a profound exploration of how sound (“sonido”) connects us with our roots, identity, and development. Over the course of seventeen emotionally resonant tracks, Henderson transforms songs into dreamlike incantations through her virtuosic warmth and intentional interpretation, embracing the influence of the African Diaspora and Latin American music on artistic expression.

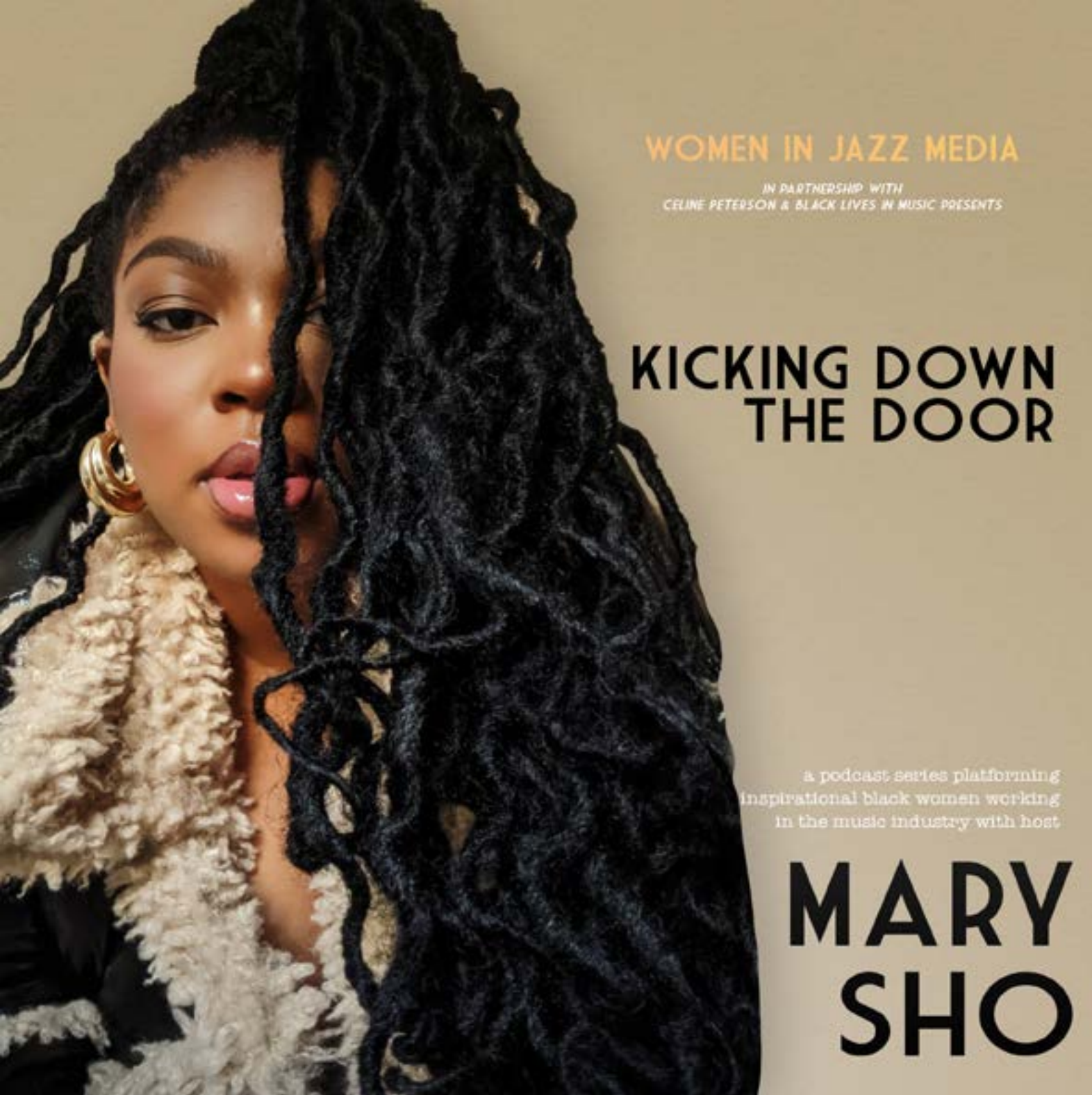
Our podcast series cover a wide range of topics, all created to platform, inform, discuss and celebrate women working in the jazz industry. You can find our podcasts at Number 12 in the top 60 Best Jazz Podcasts in FeedSpot!

We were thrilled to have our 'In Conversation With...' series nominated by the Women's International Podcast awards in the 'Changing the World one moment at a time' category.

Available on Spotify, Apple, Google and Anchor.



THE WOMEN IN JAZZ MEDIA PODCAST SERIES



Relaunching our podcast series 'Kicking Down the Door' in partnership Céline Peterson and Black Lives in Music with host Mary Sho, platforming inspirational black women in the Music industry.

And kicking down the door to start us off, we are thrilled to welcome our first guest the inspirational singer/songwriter/producer and legend China Moses



IN CONVERSATION WITH...

WITH HOST
HANNAH HORTON

Click on the images to go straight to the podcast!

Klara Devlin
Georgia Mancio
Tara Minton
Lara De Bedler & Charlotte Keeffe



Photo by Tatiana Gorilovsky



STICKS AND THRONES

Shining a light on
drummers from around
the world



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Ciara Chinniah
Jenny Pearson-Walinetski



WITH
MIGDALIA
VAN DER HOVEN

THE NOTES BETWEEN WITH LARA EIDI

A podcast series about the
world
of songwriting



Photo by Robert Crowley

ON THE BOOKCASE

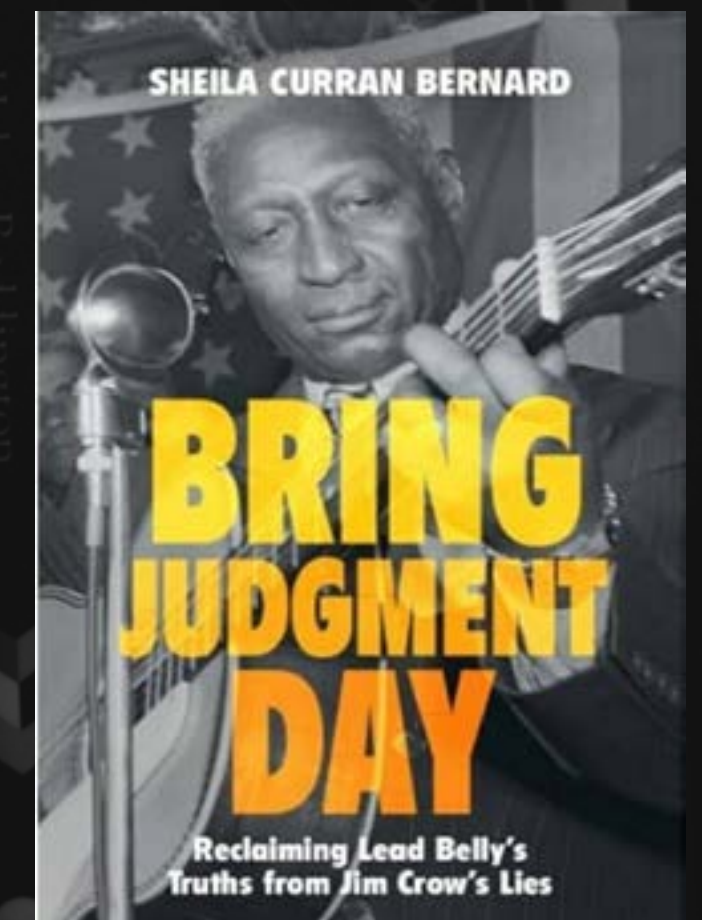
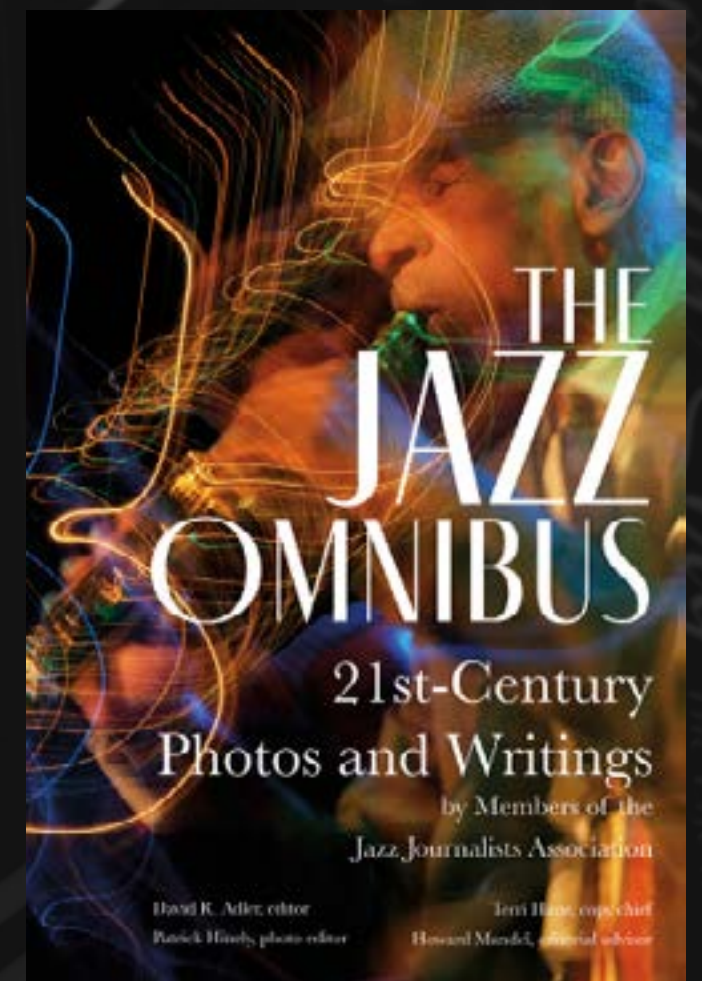
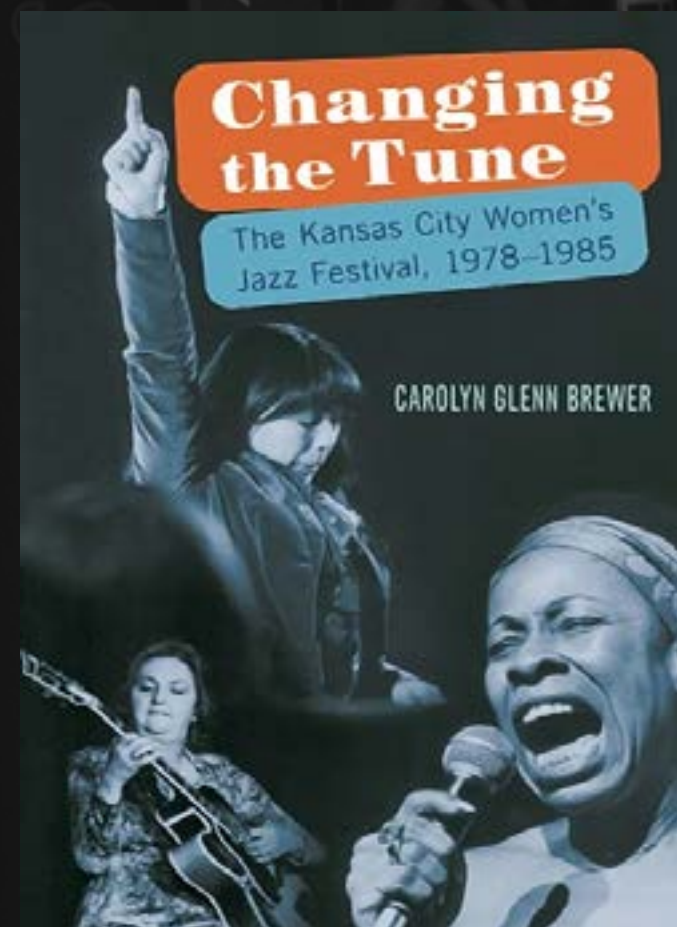
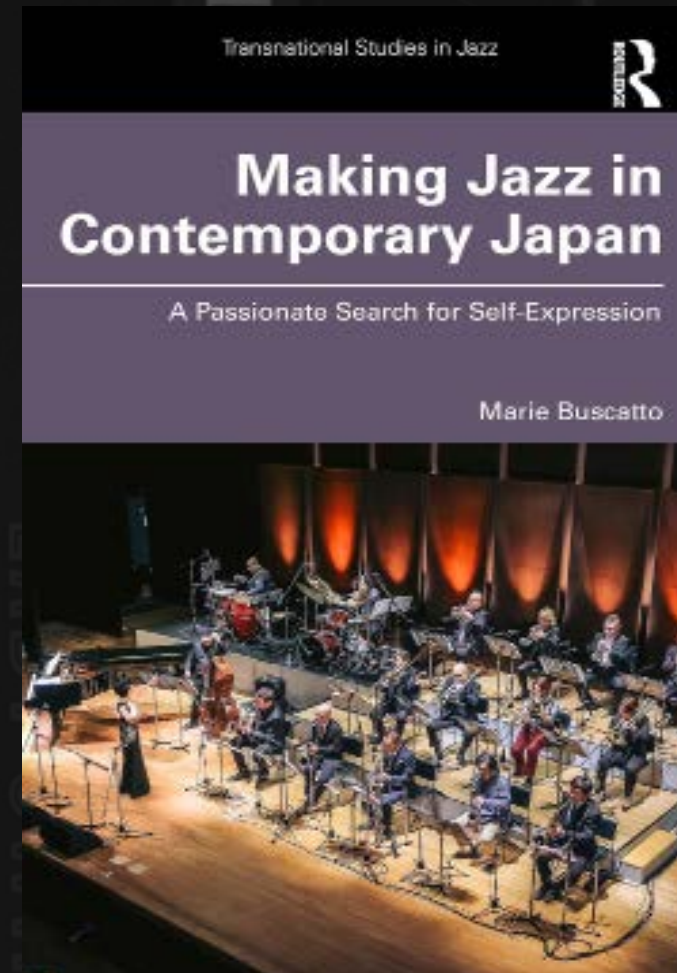


The Women In Jazz Media bookcase is all about platforming female authors from across the world. With almost 100 books, all the books included on our bookcase are also on our physical bookcase and we are very happy to share them with you all.

Our On The Bookcase podcast series explores some of the books on our bookcase and we love speaking to authors about their work. Our guests so far have been:

Jordannah Elizabeth
Maria Golia
Dr Tammy Kernodle
Monika Herzig
Paulette Jackson
Dr Joan Cartwright
Tish Oney
Maxine Gordon
Stephanie Stein Crease
Arlette Hovinga
Judith Tick
Dr Alexis McGee

Click on the image to go straight to the podcasts!



ON THE Women in Jazz Media PLAYLIST



NECTAR WOODE BY TATIANA GORILOVSKY

BRAD STONE

We are thrilled to welcome the award-winning Brad Stone back as our guest curator for our Women in Jazz Media Playlist for this edition.

Brad has been a radio programmer and music director for the past 40+ years and is the host of the brilliant 'The Creative Source' on www.soulandjazz.com which always features a beautifully diverse mix of progressive jazz and fusion, new jazz releases, current artists and original compositions. He is also the 2-time winner of the Bobby Jackson Award for Internet/Non-terrestrial jazz programming, 7-time winner of Jazz Programmer of the Year with Gavin and JazzWeek and winner of the Duke DuBois Humanitarian Award at JazzWeek for lifetime contributions to the jazz music and jazz radio community.

To listen to Brad's 'The Creative Source' show on Soul and Jazz, click [here](#)

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ARTIST!**

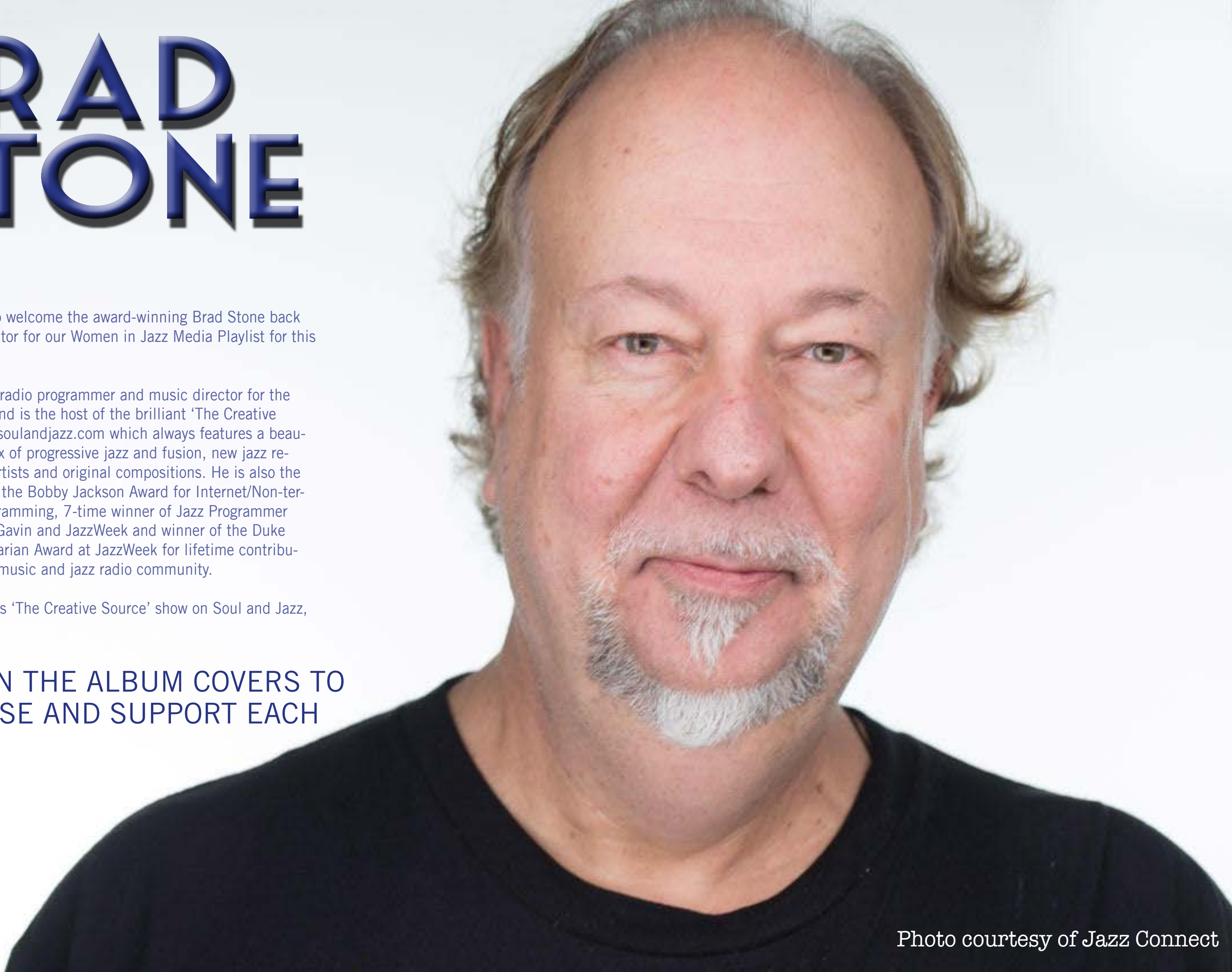


Photo courtesy of Jazz Connect

CLAIRE COPE



Claire Cope & Ensemble C
Every Journey
Adhyaropa Records

Although many of you reading this reside in the UK and may already be familiar with Ms. Cope, I was not aware of her until this release – but I'm sure glad that I am now! Her stunning compositions are expertly performed here by an 11-piece ensemble. Notable performances include Ant Law with some tasty guitar licks and Brigitte Beraha's beautiful wordless vocals. I've written before about how excited I am about modern composers writing for large ensembles/big bands/jazz orchestras – I would put Ms. Cope right at the top of that group. This is music that will stick in your mind long after listening.

PHOTOS BY BLACKHAM IMAGES

NNENNA FREELON



Nnenna Freelon
Beneath the Skin
Origin Records

Vocalist Nnenna Freelon's latest album on Origin Records is arguably her greatest release yet. Her vocal work is sensitive and beautiful – but the most impressive aspect of this album is that she wrote or co-wrote all of the tracks and also contributed to the arrangements. The always fine pianist Alan Pasqua also co-wrote and arranged some tunes – as well as playing piano and keyboards. If you're a Nnenna fan, this album is a must. If you don't know her work, this would be a great album to introduce you to her!

Photo by Chris Charles

Photo courtesy of Patois Records

RENEGADE QUEENS

Various Artists: Salsa de la Bahia – Vol. 3
Renegade Queens
Patois Records

SALSA DE LA BAHIA

A COLLECTION OF SF BAY AREA SALSA AND LATIN JAZZ



KEY ELEMENTS • KICHARUA TORRES • MARY FETTING • JACKIE RYAN
BOB CESPEDES • CHRISTELLE DURANDY • THE BLAZING REDHEADS
LICH FUENTES • KAT PARRA • MARIA MARQUEZ • KRISTEN STROM
THE MONTCLAIR WOMEN'S BIG BAND • SANDY CRESSMAN • LA DOÑA
GRUPO FALSO BAIANO • CAROLYN BRANDY • JACKIE RYAN • AVOTCJA

SALSA FROM THE BAY

Wayne Wallace is a man of many talents: trombonist, bandleader, composer, arranger, producer and record label owner (Patois Records). He's also a noted educator and Professor of Music at Indiana University's prestigious Jacobs School of Music. On this album, the 3rd in the "Salsa de la Bahia" (Salsa of the Bay) series, Wayne focusses on the many talented women musicians and composers in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, and I think this is the best in the series yet! This release is comprised of 19 tracks (on 2 discs in CD format), of which virtually each track features a different woman or group. Notable tracks on this album feature great vocalists and instrumentalists including Kat Parra, La Doña, Kristen Strom, Sandy Cressman, Jackie Ryan, Avotcja – and many others. I found it touching that a track composed by the late, great bassist John Shifflett from the Bay Area ("Moving Day") was included. If you're into Salsa, Latin Jazz and Afro-Caribbean music – this album is an absolute must for you!

SABETH PÉREZ



Sabeth Pérez
Searching for Beauty
Rogue Tone Records

I just listened to this release for the first time a couple of weeks ago and was literally stunned by its breathtaking beauty. I couldn't wait to get a track from this album on the air to share with my listeners! Argentinian by descent, but born and raised in Cologne, Germany, and now based in New York, Ms. Pérez brings not only her gorgeous voice to the tunes on this album, but her fine compositional skills. "Searching for Beauty" is further enhanced by the fine band that she has assembled, including such notables as Charles Alturá, Jon Cowherd, Ingrid Jensen, Henry Cole, Keita Ogawa, Ben Riberio and others. Don't miss out on this one!

Photo by Shervin Lainez



TESSA SOUTER



5.

Tessa Souter
Shadows and Silence: The Erik Satie Project
Noanara

I've long admired jazz vocalist Tessa Souter's work. But with this project, she takes it to another level, and I feel it is her best work yet. A wonderful concept to take Satie's music and re-arrange it for jazz. The album includes arrangements of six of Satie's compositions, as well as notable compositions by Wayne Shorter and Cassandra Wilson, and Ron Carter and Miles Davis. The all-star band, comprised of Luis Perdomo, Billy Drummond, Steven Wilson, Yasushi Nakamura and Nadjé Noordhuis is well-suited to carry out Tessa's mission. I'm sure this will be considered one of the top jazz vocal releases of 2025!

MASHA CAMPAGNE

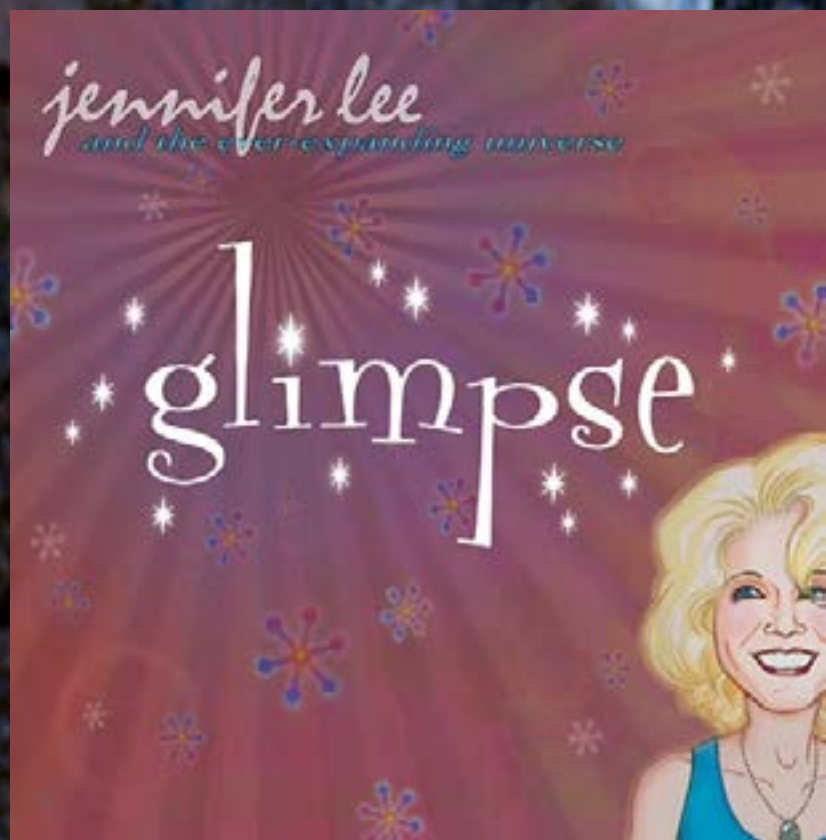


Photo by Nino Fernandez



Masha Campagne
Alegre Menina
Impetus Records

Moscow born, San Francisco based vocalist Masha Campagne is well known to those of us in the S.F. Bay Area, as she has actively performed over the years at notable local festivals such as the Monterey Jazz Festival, San Jose Jazz Summer Fest, and at SF Jazz. She has always been drawn to Latin and Brazilian music – this time focusing on great Brazilian composers as well as composing a couple of her own. Bay Area notables Natalie Cressman, Mary Fetting, Frank Martin, Erik Jekabson and others contribute adroitly. It seems a long while since her previous release – glad to have her back!



JENNIFER LEE

Jennifer Lee (and the ever-expanding universe)
Glimpse
SBE Records

An album that has grown upon me with each listening is the new release by vocalist, composer and lyricist Jennifer Lee. Ms. Lee has been performing in the San Francisco Bay area for the past ~25 years and has grown into an impressive songwriter. All but 2 of the eleven tracks on her new album are her own. A number of fine musicians contribute to this production, notably Peter Sprague on guitar, who also coproduced the album; and keyboardist Adam Shulman, who shines on the Fender Rhodes (upon first listening, without seeing who the players were, I thought “man this Rhodes player is killin’!). Notable tracks for me are “Vivid Technicolor Love” (the first track I used from this album on my radio program) and “Strange and Beautiful”, featuring John Wiitala on bass, Vince Lateano and drums, and the always tasteful Anton Schwartz on tenor saxophone.



Photo by Remo Fioroni

DENA DEROSE

Dena DeRose
Mellow Tones
High Note Records

Pianist and vocalist Dena DeRose returns with a wonderful new High Note release, appropriately named. Of course, the album starts off with “In a Mellow Tone”, and from there we get a nice mix of standards, some not often heard, as well as one original by Ms. DeRose. Expertly performed with Martin Wind and Matt Wilson as her rhythm section, and Ed Neumeister chips in on trombone on a couple of tracks. Good to have a new one from her!



Photo by David and Dena Katz

MARINA PACOWSKI

Photo by Ignatius Fischer



Marina Pacowski
New Jazz Standards Volume 7: The Music of Carl Saunders
Summit Records

The prolific French vocalist (she's also an outstanding classical pianist!) is back with another album, this one a very special nod to the late, great trumpeter Carl Saunders, who was also a gifted composer. Co-producer and trombonist Scott Whitfield was a close friend and colleague of Saunders, so it is nice to see this project come to fruition. All but one of the 14 compositions performed on this release were penned by Saunders. A literal all-star band backs Ms. Pacowski's captivating vocals: Roy McCurdy, Josh Nelson, John Clayton, Scott Whitfield, Rickey Woodard, Larry Koonse, Ken Wild – and Ron Stout holding down the vital trumpet chair. Ken Peplowski guests on clarinet on one track. Well done all around!



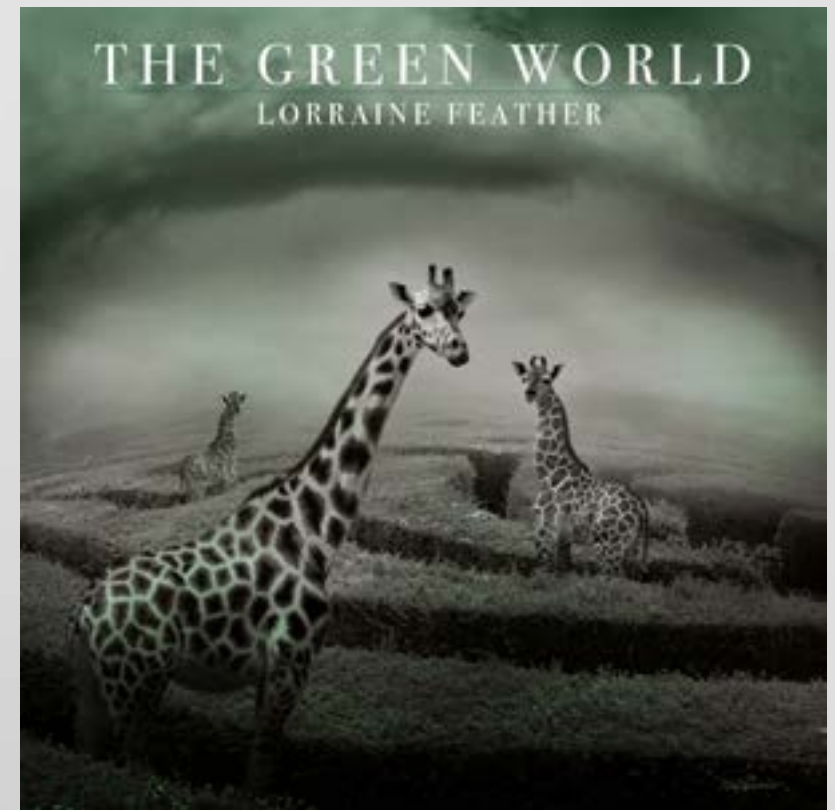
INGRID LAUBROCK



Ingrid Laubrock
Purposing the Air
Pyroclastic Records

One of the most unique recordings that has passed through my studios this year is “Purposing the Air”, by New York based saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock, originally from Germany. Ms. Laubrock is a noted artist on the New York avant-garde jazz scene, but on this album she focusses entirely on stepping back as the composer of 60 tone poems, referred to as ‘koans’ on the album (a word taken from Zen Buddhism). Perhaps more ‘modern classical’ than jazz, but this music is truly in a class by itself. The compositions are written for 4 different pairings: Fay Victor and Mariel Roberts; Sara Serpa and Matt Mitchell; Theo Bleckmann and Ben Monder; and Duo Cortona. In CD format, these works are spread over 2 discs. My favorite of the album are the performances by Bleckmann and Monder, in which Bleckman exhibits his skill at multiphonic singing – but the entire album is intriguing. This is an album in which you are meant to immerse yourself. Pyroclastic Records never fails to disappoint in supporting original works such as this.

LORRAINE FEATHER



Lorraine Feather
The Green World
Relarion

I cannot think of a lyricist who writes more quaintly (in the modern sense) than Lorraine Feather. A new album from Lorraine is always a pleasant adventure. I must admit I don't typically focus on lyrics very much myself, but Lorraine's lyrics are a notable exception. Her words are often inspired by scientific topics or other contemporary topics. I always look forward to a new album from her, and this one did not disappoint. She teams up with luminaries such as Russell Ferrante, Shelly Berg, Michael Valerio, Arturo O'Farrill and Eddie Arkin on this set of 10 new originals. Notable tracks for me: "Disappearing Universe", "The Seafloor" and "Splat!". Thank you, Lorraine, for your very special artistry.

Photo by Mikel Healey

OSTARA PROJECT

Ostara Project
Roots
Rhea Records

Canada represents well here with the Ostara Project, a 'supergroup' consisting of Rachel Therrien on trumpet, Shruti Ramani on vocals, Valérie Lacombe on drums, saxophonist Allison Au, pianist Amanda Tosoff and Jodi Proznick holding down the bass duties. As I am writing this, I am revisiting this album – the perfect music for a Saturday morning with my morning cuppa' tea! Melodically appealing and harmonically rich, the Project has composed and/or arranged all the music on this album, which reflects their varied ethnic origins. I'm particularly drawn to "Rajalakshmi", written by Ms. Ramani and seamlessly blending her Hindustani roots with jazz!



Jamie Shew
Spicy, Classy, (and a little) Sassy
Jamie Shew

JAMIE SHEW

Vocalist, pianist, educator (she is an Instructor at Fullerton College in California), composer, arranger Jamie Shew has released this, her third album as a leader. She expertly negotiates a number of familiar standards, along with a couple of her own compositions. Notably, her own “Enough” is an energetic number featuring the wonderful keyboardist Kait Dunton on organ, and Ms. Shew’s vocals carry a tinge of a country music feel on this tune. All tracks produced and arranged by Ms. Shew, and accompanied by Jeremy Siskind on piano, Lyman Medeiros on bass and Mark Ferber – along with Ms. Dunton on 2 tracks, Mike Scott on guitar on 5 tracks, and Mario Jose providing some background vocals.



Photo by Anna Webber

WOMEN IN JAZZ MEDIA

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BLACK LIVES IN MUSIC

MORE THAN A FEW OF US

Inspired by Willard Jenkins book 'Ain't But A Few of Us', the Women in Jazz Media's new mentoring scheme **More Than A Few of Us** is open for applicants!

Specifically aimed at increasing the number of black jazz journalists across the world and supported by Black Lives in Music, who work to dismantle structural racism in the industry and work to take action to create a level playing field for everyone to have an equal chance to succeed, along with award winning legend Maxine Gordon, the mentoring scheme has significant support, not least of which is the through the inspirational mentors who are involved.

More Than A Few of Us is open for applicants!

[To apply, please follow this link](#)

#knockingdownthedoors

**BLACK
LIVES IN
MUSIC**



PHOTO OF CAMILLA GEORGE BY MONIKA S JAKUBOWSKA

ZAMAR



Photo by Tatiana Gorilovsky