

WOM

JULY 2026



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DR BRADLEY STONE

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GORILOVSKY

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Welcome to the 16th edition of the Women in Jazz Media magazine.

Thank you to all of you that are taking the time to explore the work we have put together for you. Artists from across the world from Italy, South Africa, Denmark, New York, New Zealand, UK and more. Women both in front and behind the scenes, we talk to radio hosts, trombonists, cellists, vocalists, label owners, pianists, composers, writers, flutists and more. Artists with narratives that should be known, music that needs to be heard and experiences that help us all navigate the world we live in.

This is an interactive magazine, so please click away and visit websites, buy music, watch videos or download as a pdf. Please take your time. This magazine is not created as a quick read. We hope you will be inspired by the stories the photographs and writers speak to; be motivated by the artists' music. 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

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A NEW ERA FOR SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ: RORISANG SECHELE

BY SHIREEN FISHER

When Rorisang Sechele released *The Seed* - the evocative first installment of her *In Full Bloom* trilogy - it immediately established her as a studio prodigy on the Gauteng circuit. But the true test of a contemporary jazz visionary lies on the live stage, and she spectacularly answered that call at this year's Cape Town International Jazz Festival. Sharing a lineup with living legends like Abdullah Ibrahim and global trailblazers like Jacob Collier, Sechele commanded her festival debut with absolute authority. Her set was a breathtaking live translation of *The Seed*, a performance rooted in deep vulnerability and storytelling that proved this project isn't just a collection of songs, but the blueprint for the future of South African jazz.

For an artist just stepping into the spotlight, this introduction feels less like a manufactured debut and more like the natural unfolding of a lifelong design - one that begins with her very identity. Though she admits with a laugh that she spent her childhood begging her mother to change her "boyish" given name to something like "Angel," the name Rorisang carries a prophetic weight. Translating to "Praise" in Tswana, it was a name intentionally chosen by her mother, a church choir conductor, alongside a drum-playing father.

Raised in a household entirely surrounded by rhythm and melody, Sechele didn't experience a singular, lightning-bolt

moment of musical awakening. Instead, music was an inheritance. In hindsight, the presence of the word "sang" tucked neatly into the end of her name feels less like a coincidence and more like a quiet blueprint; she didn't simply choose a career in jazz, she stepped directly into the calling that her family had already spoken into existence.

"I think this has always been a calling for me from a very young age," she says. "I actually didn't want to study music. I didn't want to take on music as a career because I was aware of the industry from a very young age and I was afraid of pursuing that. But you know, when you're called to do something, you always find yourself in that place. There was a time in primary school when we were doing a musical or school production called *Catastrophe*. My arts and culture and choir teacher, Mrs. Raymond, gave us a studio experience. And she was like, 'You're gonna sing solo. You're singing the first verse of 'Man in the Mirror' by Michael Jackson.' And then we went to the studio, I was like, 'Oh, this is cute. I think this would be cute as a career.'"

"As you grow older, you have uncles and people around you who are like, 'This is not a sustainable career to pursue. Are you sure you want to do this? I think you should be an accountant. I think you should be a doctor.' And you also see headlines of artists being famous but dying poor. So, that discouraged me. But I'm here now." That inherited calling soon found structure

in rigorous, formal training. Sechele's academic music journey began at Pro Arte Alphen Park, a dedicated arts school where she took music as a subject and immersed herself in the demanding discipline of classical vocal training. This solid, technical foundation laid the groundwork for her next major evolution at the Tshwane University of Technology. It was there, surrounded by new creative influences, that she was given the opportunity to formally study jazz - a transition that allowed her to blend her classical precision with the fluid, improvisational storytelling that has quickly become her signature sound.

"I think it really gave me versatility more than anything," she explains. "Obviously, I'm more able to appreciate different styles of music. With technicalities from classical, like the way you approach singing, that's cool. But with jazz, then you're able to improvise, you're able to scat. There's a bit more freedom with jazz. Even when you are singing your neo-souls, there is a technicality in understanding chord progression, the harmony as well. And how can I make this make sense even in the style that I'm singing in? I think that's what it did for me more than anything."

This rich intersection of classical discipline and jazz experimentation ultimately became the launchpad for her entry into the professional recording space. Yet, transforming academic talent into a tangible commercial release is a notoriously daunting hurdle for any emerging artist, requiring an intense mix of grit, timing, and industry navigation. When looking at the birth of her debut project, The Seed, which was released in 2024, the reality of making that massive leap comes into focus, raising the question of what it actually takes to secure a first album deal and what that foundational process looks like behind the scenes.

"I actually got an opportunity to be under

an incubator program with the South African State Theatre. And usually when they do the program, the opportunity that is given to the musicians is to actually do like a performance. So live performance of three concerts. But they wanted to approach it differently. And with me, they're like, actually, we're giving you a budget and go and record a music video and go and record a full project under this program. Because I already had the music, it really was just money that I needed to push it forward. When this came, I was like, it has to be good. Because what do you mean? So it was through that program that I was actually able to do what I did with the project." That behind-the-scenes effort quickly bore fruit, translating into an overwhelming wave of public validation upon the project's release. For a debut artist, sending a first body of work out into the world is a moment of intense vulnerability, but the public embrace of The Seed proved that her music had struck a deeply collective chord. Reflecting on the impact the tracks have made on listeners, Sechele admits the emotional weight of that connection still catches her off guard.

"The response keeps me speechless every time," Sechele says. "I never get used to it. I never get used to the way people receive my music, but more than anything, the way they resonate with it."

"It just reminds me why I do what I do and why it's important that even after you've created something, you release it because we're not just creating for ourselves," she continues. **"We're creating for the people around us as well."**

That profound sense of connection found its ultimate live canvas at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival in March this year - the ultimate proving ground for South African musicians. Stepping onto a stage of that size is a massive milestone for any young artist, but for Sechele, it was the

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PHOTO BY MASBOO PRODUCTIONS

literal realisation of a teenage dream. "It definitely felt like it's come full circle," she recalls. "I actually have a friend who was my roommate in high school at hostel. And there was a time when we were talking about wanting to go to the Cape Town International Jazz Festival. And I reached out to her and I was like, 'Do you remember when we were in the room and we were talking about going to the Cape Town International Jazz Festival. Look at us now. Look at me now!' I've actually performed on this stage! It was my first time on that stage as well, sharing my gift."

With her foundations firmly established at home, the horizon is quickly expanding for the rising vocalist. Having already captured the attention of local audiences and global festival crowds, her gaze is now set entirely on the international stage. When looking at what lies ahead for the next year, Sechele is aiming for the highest peaks of the global music landscape, fully prepared to take her sound across borders.

"International tours would be a beautiful thing. I feel like I'm closing off the establishment in South Africa, as a South African artist, jazz artist, or overall artist. So it would be nice to try some international stuff, international collaborations. That is something I'd love. You've got the world coming to watch. So you know, like it's really easier and stuff."

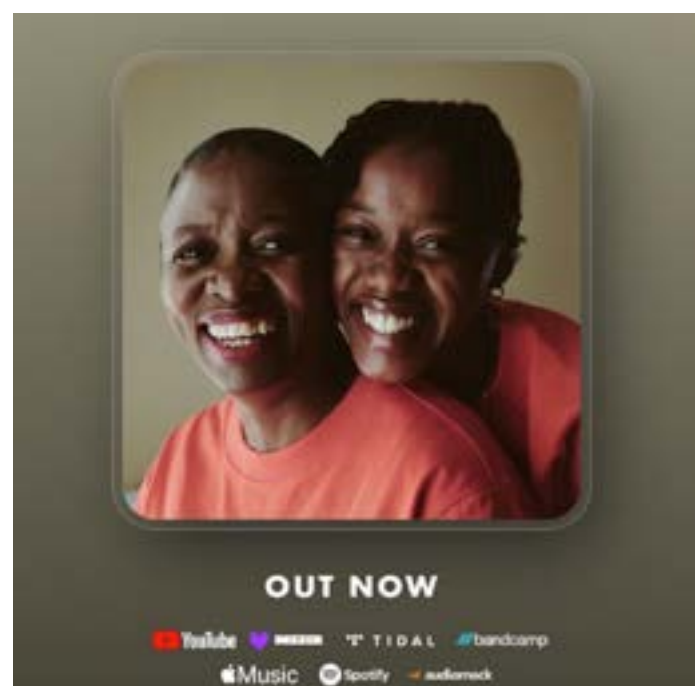
This June, Rorisang announced the release of her latest single, "Mama", which is an ode to mothers, marking the start of part two of her debut EP series, In Full Bloom. The single - produced by long-time collaborator Thato Modika - features musicians who have played an important role in Sechele's journey.

Sechele says, "The recording brings together DiTeboho Kobedi on keys, Mzamo Mthembu on drums, Andile Skhosana on guitar, alongside the rich horn arrangements

of Themba Mhlango on saxophone, with Lebogang Komane on trumpet. Together, they create a warm and textured soundscape that effortlessly blends jazz, soul and storytelling."

"Mama" opens the next chapter of "In Full Bloom", of my three-part EP series inspired by the journey of a flower's growth. Part one, "The Seed", explored beginnings and potential. Now part two explores the theme of budding, a meditation on transition, becoming and self-discovery. The trilogy draws inspiration from the Japanese idiom Oubaitori, a philosophy that reminds us that each flower blooms in its own season and possesses a unique beauty; in the same way, every person flourishes according to their own path and pace, embracing instead, the beauty of individual growth."

RORISANG SECHELE **LINKS HERE**



GRETCHEN PARLATO

ALL PHOTOS BY LAUREN DESBERG



LOOKING AT THE HONEST SIDE OF MUSIC WITH GRETCHEN PARLATO'S "THE WISE ONES"

BY GERMANA STELLA LA SORSA

The music industry – and in particular the jazz industry – is in constant change and evolution, and this has been clear for some time now.

In this era of AI and algorithms, the general concern of music lovers (and beyond) is about the authenticity and the honesty of what seem to be more and more mere products of a market, that have to fit a certain strategies, in a certain amount of time. Quickly, rapidly, heartlessly. And the attention falls progressively on details that are further and further from the music itself: the hottest collaborations, the brands, the hooks, the number of streams. All details that often distract the listeners and drag them away from those special minutiae: a moving melody, the story behind a composition, the relationship behind a partnership, the hearts that beat behind a production. All the human features that make music not just a product but an act of artistic creation.

This might sound dark to write – and for you to read – but my bleak preamble has a silver lining for you: for those who still want to cry and laugh over a composition, have goosebumps and feel the shivers down their spines listening to music, there's hope. From an artist that in her twenty-year career has preserved, with each of her works, her authenticity and honesty, comes a new release that does just that. The artist in question is Gretchen Parlato and her new album, [The Wise Ones](#), will be out in September. And it's going to be a real musical breath of fresh air.

With a singular voice and a magnificent, distinctive rhythmic vocal approach, Parlato has redefined the direction of vocal jazz – and beyond – since the beginning of her career, with works that have become landmarks of contemporary jazz (and, in particular, turning points for singers) embracing and encompassing a multitude of genres.

Her music is – and has always been – honest, real and transparent. As are the relationships that bind her to her many collaborators – from the long term one with Lionel Loueke to the more recent with Alan Hampton, co-producer of her new release. And I think this is the magic that happens in [The Wise Ones](#). The album is a perfect celebration of all Parlato's artistic strengths: a dream team (featuring Robert Glasper, Gerald Clayton, Mark Guiliana, as well as vocalists Becca Stevens and Moonchild's Amber Navran, Meshell Ndegeocello and Josh Mease), united to celebrate what is meant to be her statement about time, evolution and transformation, but also gratitude and appreciation for everything that comes with existence itself.

In the [The Wise Ones](#) there are all the musical influences and melting pot of sounds that have differentiated Parlato's music from everyone else's, merged together – with a new awareness – in compositions destined to be remembered. But it's even more than this: you can hear the hearts, the closeness and the harmony between the musicians that have beautifully entangled their minds and souls to create something that goes beyond the numbers



PHOTO BY LAUREN DESBERG

PHOTO BY LAUREN DESBERG



and the algorithms. And it feels good.

GSLS: Your new album [The Wise Ones](#) reflects both continuity and change and is the perfect statement of your evolution from the distinctive roots of your early works (“In a Dream” released in 2009 and “The Lost and Found”, out in 2011) to more daring and intrepid music. Can you tell us how you have evolved and how that has shaped your artistic ideas over the last 20 years?

GP: *I can't believe it's been 20 years! I feel like the first thought, to me, is that the evolution of the art and the music has just gone in alignment with my evolution as a person, in life, so I think the key for me was always not trying too hard to create something or find some statement.*

It was more that inner realisation of just writing music about who I am, what's happening in life, my experience and something very honest and very personal, and just having the art reflect who I am in life.

When you mention these past albums, it's like a portrait of a certain time in my life and things that were happening. So, with [The Wise Ones](#) it's the same thing now - I'm a different person than who I was back then, so the art will reflect that. And what's interesting is when I listen back, even though the art reflects a specific time, the songs hopefully to me are universal, where I can sing them from this perspective where I am now, written decades ago and have a new version, a new definition of it, a new realisation within the piece; so that's cool. I think that's cool for art to sit that way, where everyone can have their own experience with every time they hear it.

GSLS: So, when you sing songs that you composed in the past, do you sing them like

“Gretchen now”, do you still recall those roots or it's more a mix of feelings, from both the past and the present?

GP: *I think it's a little bit of a mix, but it's ultimately me singing as who I am now. I think the goal would be for me to try to take that song that I wrote, acknowledge who I was then, realise who I am now and sing it from this place.*

A perfect example is a song I wrote called “Better Than”. I still sing that in sets - I just sang it a week ago with Taylor Eigsti in Tokyo and I went through this process in my head: hearing it and feeling it in the moment and thinking that I remember who I was when I wrote the song and what I was thinking about when I wrote it. And now I'm singing the same lyrics, but I'm seeing it from the other side. Without realising when I wrote it, the first part of this song is about “there's nothing better than this person”, and maybe someday there will be something better. And now I'm at this “something better than” part, thinking back to when I wasn't sure if there was anything better than what I had, and now I'm on the other side. To me, the ultimate reward as an artist is that you can create and have things evolve with you universally, without having to really change the song. It's just changing the perspective of who you are when you sing it. It's still like it's documented as who you are then – which is very charming but you can still sing it later, like when Joni Mitchell sings “Both Sides Now”: each one has this amazing, special, unique quality to it and one's not better than the other; it's just like “Wow! That's her then, this is her now and I love them both, for these different reasons.”

GSLS: In the title-track [The Wise Ones](#) you start singing: “Someday this will be long ago”. You said that this phrase opens your heart, filling you with gratitude and anchoring you in the present. What are the achievements that you're most grateful for

and how have they made you into the artist that you are today?

GP: *When someone asks about achievements, you think there's something like an award, a great gig or something, which is part of an answer. You know, I could be grateful for the actual achievements of being the first singer in the Thelonious Monk Institute, winning the competition or singing at the Hollywood Bowl on the same night as Billie Eilish, something like this. But also, achievements to me could be becoming a mother, creating a family, marrying someone I adore and having this unit, being grateful that, in this moment, everyone in the family is happy, healthy and connected. So being grateful for the people in my life and what I've helped create and cultivate.*

Also an achievement is, as an artist, just being able to continue to create music that's honest to me and that means something to people. There was a time some years ago, where I didn't know what my next project was gonna be. You know, you have a lull in your creative process so the achievement could just be to create an album and a repertoire. I went from being totally unsure what I wanted to do, next to having a new album and being happy with it. So those are some some thoughts I have on achievements.

Thinking about this question in connection with the [The Wise Ones](#) lyric - "Someday this will be long ago" - I think the whole point is to acknowledge these wins in life, these achievements, these good feelings and know that they are these stepping stone moments that you'll look back on someday and see the path that you've taken: it will be these marking points and that everything is in the moment, is fleeting, it will soon become just a memory but it will have a significance.

GSLS: You've said that you have always been patient with your creativity, "allowing the wave to come in due time".

Talking about the making of this new release, [The Wise Ones](#) that is co-produced by Alan Hampton and features many innovative musicians who helped bring your vision for the album to life, including Robert Glasper, Becca Stevens and Amber Navran as well as Gerald Clayton, Mark Guiliana, and Josh Mease. In general, we've seen many amazing collaborations in your work – such as your long-term partnership with Lionel Loueke. Can you talk us through the process of collaborating and following the same (...or different) creative waves with other people?

GP: *When you name the names, I've been very lucky to have these collaborators and friendships and part of the answer starts with having a personal relationship with somebody that is genuine, that is a musical one, that's just connecting as friends and people and you realise you have a like-mindedness of how you approach music and care about music and interact. You can play with people where it's great music but it might not always be this buzzing spark. So the people you listed on this project are people who I love musically and just love as people to hang out with and be with anyway.*

I think the approach is the same to just know that there's a really strong connection, something unique for both people to be open to. You wanna be very open with your ideas and what you offer and then also open to know that there could be shifting and movement and different opinions about what's the best thing for the music. I think the similarity with all those people is that they care so much about the music but there no one's holding on too tightly where they don't let other people in, so we have to really a really nice flow: sometimes there are great ideas but if two people are really stuck in their ways and don't completely

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agree, it doesn't flow. I think no matter who it is in all those people listed, it's the same kind of openness and it's also just trusting the other person and trusting that everyone's on the same page and that everyone's capable of making this elevated experience.

GSLS: The first single that was released was 'Capricorn', a composition by Alan Hampton with lyrics co-written by saxophonist Matt Parker. This is also the tune that opens the album, setting the mood for a resurging atmosphere. Can you tell us more about the tune and how it came to life?

GP: I love this song so much! I wanted Alan to be a part of this project, to be on the album as a musician and also as co-producer as well, and this was one of the first songs he brought to me and that he wrote for me for this album. So he wrote the music and the melodies, the harmony, the structure of the song, which is just brilliant to me. Our mutual friend, Matt Parker, helped with the lyrics.

To me, I heard it and harmonically and musically, I thought this should be the opening track. It was just very clear. It had this immediate pull. I told him that day hearing that it feels like a Stevie Wonder song, like a new classic. And that just shows the brilliance and the genius of Alan and that's really so much of what I wanted for this project too: for people to hear how brilliant he is. He has everything to do with the flow of this album and literally the bass - the bottom end of keeping this together. He's so talented with his songwriting and with his singing and we have such a great connection that I knew that he needed a shine and a spotlight. It's great because he's also a part of every tour and every show because maybe, someday, he'll be busy and I can't have him, but I need Alan to execute this music live, it's gotta be him so we were able to do that and share the music together too.

GSLS: You've always been a bold musician, continuously exploring your vocal language and fearlessly navigating through genres - from jazz to R&B, soul, pop and African and Brazilian music - creating a very distinctive and unique sound. In a music scene that often feels the need to label artists (and in particular female singers) and wants to confine them to one specific genre, what advice would you give to the new generation of young artists that can't fit just one box?

GP: I think just I'd say "join the club"! I just turned 50 some months ago and my friends who are 50, they're like: "come on in, the water's fine!" I think it's that similar mentality though: I'm not the only one who came up wanting to incorporate and loving all kinds of music.

When I came up and I asked myself "what's my first album gonna be? What's the statement? What's the sound they have?", it wasn't just one style. And even in jazz... I guess I'm considered a jazz singer but I still have yet to do a standards album in swing feel - which I can, I would like to and it will be great when that happens - but, to me, it was more about a genuine statement and just gathering repertoire that is meaningful music, no matter what the style. What unites it is just our approach, the sound of the musicians and our take on it.

*There's so many other people that have done that before me and alongside me and continue, so the advice for people doing it now is to like just **follow your heart and your own instinct**, but also see the path ahead of you of people that have done it and come and join us, there's room for everyone: for something to be very traditional in a certain genre of music and I think there's room for some bending and some shape shifting. Maybe the theme of our interview today is to be honest and genuine and I think, from that place, the*

motives behind it are not anything else but just making great art and connecting with people. You just do what feels right and just be honest with who you are and what the context of the music is. The pure jazz genre is something to be appreciated and acknowledged in history, its context and its relevance so you can't be a jazz musician and not study jazz, you can't just kind of fall into that by ear. There's a lot to know and to be a part of but, once you do that, I think it's ok to explore and be different. So that would go with any genre. Whatever you're incorporating, just know the context and the history and the relevance of that music and then create the art that feels right to you.



[GRETCHEN PARLATO](#)
[LINKS HERE](#)







PHOTO BY LISA INDIGOBURNS WORMSLEY

ZOE RAHMAN

ZOE RAHMAN

THE HEART OF AUTHENTICITY

Multi award winning artist Zoe Rahman astounds audiences across the world. As a composer and pianist, her work encapsulates her classical grounding and jazz legacy with her British/Bengali heritage to create a truly and much needed original voice.

Studying at the Royal Academy of Music, Oxford University and then Berklee College of Music, it is no wonder Zoe has become one of the most sought-after and internationally acclaimed pianists and composers. Nominated for the nationwide Mercury Prize in 2006, she went on to win the Ivor Novello Impact Award at the Ivors Composer Awards, a MOBO Award (best Jazz Act) and 'Jazz Album of the Year' at the UK's Parliamentary Jazz Awards.

Performing across the world in both her own projects and collaborating with others, Zoe's portfolio is astounding. Performances in USA, Japan, Germany (NDR), Australia, North Sea Jazz, Kuwait, Sweden, Norway, Italy, France, Barbados, Romania, Hungary, Ireland, Algeria, Estonia, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and extensive work with artists including Courtney Pine, George Mraz, Clark Tracey, Soothsayers, Penguin Cafe Orchestra, Reem Kelani, Natacha Atlas, Yoko Ono and Martha Wainwright.

Zoe's latest album, *Hull Suite Live* came out this month after a launch at London's The Vortex, and it was wonderful to speak to Zoe about the new album and her life as an artist.

Before we talk about the album, I was just reflecting on what an incredible career you have had so far. You've achieved so much! Especially as an independent artist. How would you describe your life as an artist right now?

*As an artist, the awards and nominations are fantastic, of course. I'm still an independent artist, and although I do have an agent for gigs abroad, I think that has made a significant difference to how much I gig, and how much effort I need to put into everything. This has been 25 years and now my eighth album. So even so, putting this album out, it's still not easy, I have to say. The landscape has really changed. I read a book in the late 90s called, *Stuff the Music Business: The DIY Guide to Making an Album* and I dug it out the other day because I was just interested. But I wanted to put a record out, so the only way to do it was to do it myself. And not many people were doing it then, so I didn't have anyone to go to for advice, you know. So I read this book and then I thought, okay, fine. I know what to do now. I just went through the process, all the little things that no one tells you, even the detail of what to put on the album, things about copyright, the manufacturing process, how to market, the whole process.*

It is funny to think that doing things as an independent was a fairly new thing, not that long ago really, and now almost everyone has to do it that way. But looking back to your first release, do you feel wiser now with



PHOTO BY LISA INDIGOBURNS WORMSLEY

this album?

Yes. I mean, obviously older and wiser, for sure. But you know, life always throws you something unexpected. With any album I make, a new problem will present itself and I have to find a way around that problem. So it's constantly a series of just finding out, DIY style, how to get around issues and make the best of it.

But you do find a way around it all and quite magnificently, I must add! I think firstly as an artist and then secondly as a female artist and then also I'll add as a female instrumentalist, there are many challenges, but we find our way around these things.

Absolutely, yes, we do. I do take heart from the fact that there are other musicians who are in a similar position. You know, the jazz world, it's very niche and so you have your audience, but you really have to find them and work hard to keep the audience, and to keep yourself interested in your music

and make music that's saying something about yourself. I put albums out when I feel I've got something to say, and this album in particular has come about in a slightly different way to my other albums, because a lot of the music on the album is a part of a commissioned piece.

*Well, and that segues beautifully, because the new album *Hull Suite Live* was commissioned by the Hull Jazz Festival for World Piano Day, so I was curious firstly about your relationship with Hull.*

I've played in Hull quite a few times over the years, mainly with Courtney Pine, but last year, actually, I was there with Arun Ghosh, and then a very long time ago, I played at the opening of Hull City Stadium with Roland Gift, from the Fine Young Cannibals. So I've been to Hull a few times, but this commission came out of the blue really. They just emailed and said, we'd like to commission you. Would you be interested? Firstly in writing a solo piano piece, 20 minutes, to come and play



at World Piano Day. And at first, of course, I mean, amazing that someone's rung me out of the blue, because I am a composer. I like writing, you know, but I get very few opportunities when people ask me. I mean, I have written for theatre, I've written a couple of theatre shows with people, one of which ended up going to China in November, that was exciting.

I have had a few commissions here and there, but this was something I could get my teeth into, something for myself to play. And in that respect, quite a scary thought. 20 minutes doesn't sound much, but when you're playing solo...It's not just sitting down and kind of noodling around, I could have done that. I wanted to do it properly.

Did he give you any kind of theme or was it quite free?

He didn't initially know, but then I asked, is there anything you want me to base the

piece on? Then an email came back about the two statues in Hull and that maybe I could think about those and themes of migration and family and the sea, because it was a port city. The migrants statue ("The Crossing" by Mark DeGraffenried and Neil Hadlock), commemorates 2.2 million people who travelled from northern Europe down through Hull as a port city from the 1800s to 1914. They then went on by train to Liverpool and then on to America and places. So that was the journey. So that's one part of the story. And then the other statue that I was asked to think about was one called 'The Journey' and that looks out towards sea, across the hump towards Iceland, and a twin statue looks back, and that commemorates fishermen, seafarers and trade between those two countries. So when I sat down to write I was thinking very much about families, migration, sea travel.

After some time, my own family story was right at the forefront of my mind because

it is a story of migration. It's a story of sea crossings. It's also related to World Piano Day and there's an amazing story my mum told me recently.

I wanted to ask you about that as I remember reading something - did your mum sell her piano?

Yes, she did! I only found that out when I was doing my last album. She told me this story and I couldn't believe that I didn't know! I've never seen her sit at a piano. I've never seen her play a piano. She's bought pianos for us. She's provided her children with instruments, you know. My sister's a classical piano player. I play piano. My brother plays. My younger sister is very musical. My parents never really let on that they had this sort of history. So my mum is from Halifax, and grew up there until she went on a ship to New Zealand. It was after the war, her dad was a prisoner of war in Burma and he'd come back and I think they just wanted a fresh, like a new start. She grew up there for a while, and then she went to Sydney, Australia. She went to Sydney University, where she met my dad who had travelled again by ship from Dhaka, Bangladesh which is where he's from - so another sea journey to Sydney. He briefly went back to visit his family in Dhaka, but to get back into Australia governments were very strict about who comes and goes into countries, and actually at the time, until 1973, they had a whites-only policy.

So he had to prove that he had the sort of financial means to support himself when he came back to Australia. They were both students and didn't have very much money, but my mum did have a piano. So she sold her piano, and that's how they proved that they had money in the bank, and then he could come back. So if she hadn't done that, then obviously he wouldn't have been able to come. We wouldn't have been born. I wouldn't be playing piano, I wouldn't

be writing music. So that whole kind of a global love story came into my mind when I was writing.

So on the album, there's a suite which is 25 minutes divided into six parts. The first part is a very short opening theme, and I was sitting at the piano, just imagining my mum as a 10-year-old girl, looking out to sea, having never travelled abroad, and taking this 6 week boat trip.

I don't want to digress, but my parents travelled from the UK to Australia before I was born and lived in Australia for four years and they went on a boat - I've wonderful black and white pictures of my mum and dad on a boat and I have often wondered about how they felt.

It's amazing, isn't it? So I had my mum in mind, and that whole sense of families, because of the statue, people traveling, either because of love, or because they wanted a new start, or economic reasons, or fleeing persecution. That concept of people moving around the world and travelling through Hull in particular, why people were moving, being on the sea for long periods of time.

There's a track called Waves, signifying waving goodbye, waving hello, and also the waves of the ocean. One of the pieces is called Voyage, dedicated to that statue. There's a track called Piano Story, which is the story about my parents. And then the last track on the suite is called East Coast, Hull being on the East Coast of England, connecting with the East Coast of America, which is where people were travelling to. In that piece, I was imagining the sounds - when you reach a destination, and absorb the new sights and smells and everything that's going on when you arrive. How do you feel as a person, experiencing all this? What were people listening to? It was pre 1914, so the beginning of the jazz era, ragtime, so that was what I was thinking about when I

was writing that piece.

You've recorded it as a live album. So I am guessing that was important to you, that live feeling?

Yes. We recorded it last year at the Vortex. I was just doing a gig because it was written for solo piano, and then I started playing it with my trio, Gene Calderazzo and Alec Dankworth, fantastic musicians, who I've worked with for a very long time. Just one day, I just thought, well, in the Vortex, they have the facility to record. So I just asked the sound engineer, do you mind? Can you just record the gig? I like recording things when I can, to listen back. I liked how it turned out, the trio sound. Because it's very difficult when you go into a studio to play in that way, if there's no audience to bounce off. It's a completely different energy in the room. If the piano's in one room, the drums are in another, and you can't necessarily see each other very well. You're not hearing each other acoustically quite often. It really doesn't show us in our best light, you know. So it was really important in terms of the band sound. Gene and Alec, they're phenomenal musicians and they really deeply listened to each other and to me and everybody's listening and reacting off each other. That's the best thing for me about jazz, that's what I love about it. It's a live art form, it's very much in the now, in the moment.

It's an ongoing conversation, isn't it?

Yes, absolutely. It just so happened that the stars happened to align on these particular tracks, and I just thought, why not let people hear that energy? And also, I think really importantly, at this point of where we are, how the landscape of the music industry has changed since I started making albums - the advent of streaming and AI, which is completely decimating the music industry as we know it. AI in particular, you know, people don't realize

when they go into restaurants or wherever they're out and about, that they're actually listening to music that hasn't been created by human beings, and people can't often tell the difference, and so for me, it was really important that people hear an audience, in the room, enjoying the music. We make music because the audience are reacting in a certain way. We make music with each other as human beings. That music wouldn't have been created if there weren't three of us listening to each other and having a conversation, and making mistakes, and correcting the mistakes, and making them into something better collectively.

So in retrospect, listening to it afterwards, I don't mind that it's not perfect. The piano might not sound how I want it to sound, necessarily, if I'd gone into a studio, there were certain notes that we didn't hit, you might hear the bass player hit a mic, or, you know, that someone's turning a page, but it's real - you can hear people breathing.

But as you say, I think the world needs more of that! AI is deeply disturbing me and fascinatingly, being authentic is now a thing! I've seen so many reviews and articles where the top line is 'authentic', suddenly being real is a marketable thing. I can't get my head around it. As artists...

...we are authentic.

Yes!

It's human. Humanity is getting lost, but this music, and particularly the subject matter of the album, especially that suite, it's about family, it's about connection. When I did the world premiere of the show, I went to Hull, and I got collected in the taxi from the station to my hotel, and I always get talking to taxi drivers, because that's just what I do. I take it around the place, and normally, when I say I'm going to a jazz gig, they say oh, I hate Jazz. I say,

what do you mean you hate jazz? Do you like Frank Sinatra? Oh yeah, I love Frank Sinatra.

I say the same thing! When everyone says, I hate jazz I always use Frank Sinatra as my first example.

Excellent. You know that conversation. But this guy was different and he was interested. We had a really interesting conversation and I asked him where he was from - I always ask people where they're from and he said, imagine the worst place in the world to be at the moment, he said, his family is from Gaza. He's lived in Hull for 35 years. So when I got to the gig, I dedicated the first performance to him and his family. We talked about his family, he showed me photographs of them really suffering at the time. And also when I was writing the piece, I was thinking about the shoreline in Gaza and how it connects people.

I was going to say, although it is about the past as such, it's impossible to not consider the current time.

Exactly, and migration being a huge topic, and the fact that they have a statue to migrants in Hull, and that now all those people, 2.2 million people who went from Europe to America and other places, and now we have the advent of ICE and people trying to get rid of immigrants. It all connects. It's been an ongoing story.

But for me, transcending all that, we're all connected, we're all human.



Zoe is touring across the UK and returns to Hull in November.

Text by FIONA ROSS

[Click here for Zoe's live dates.](#)

[ZOE RAHMAN LINKS HERE](#)

BEHIND THE LENS

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

**TATIANA
GORILOVSKY**

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A woman with dark hair and large hoop earrings is captured in a moment of intense musical performance. She is playing a double bass, with her left hand on the neck and her right hand near the body. Simultaneously, she is singing into a microphone, her mouth wide open in a powerful vocal expression. She is wearing a dark blue short-sleeved top with a white collar and a small, light-colored star pattern. The background is dark, and the scene is lit with warm, stage-like lighting that highlights her face and the instrument.

Esperanza Spalding
by Tatiana Gorilovsky
Love Supreme Jazz Festival
East Sussex
July, 2026

Rebekah Reid by Tatiana Gorilovsky
Ronnie Scotts, Upstairs
London
June, 2026





SCOTT'S
CLUB



Emma-Jean Thackray by Tatiana Gorilovsky
Ronnie Scott's
London
March 2026



Cassie Kinoshi's seed. by Tatiana Gorilovsky
Manchester Jazz Festival
May, 2026





LOVE SUPR
JAZZ FESTIVAL



Romarna Campbell
by Tatiana Gorilovsky
Love Supreme Jazz Festival
East Sussex
July, 2026



Samara Joy
by Tatiana Gorilovsky
Love Supreme Jazz Festival
East Sussex
July, 2026



LOVE SUPREME
JAZZ FESTIVAL





Olympia Vitalis
by Tatiana Gorilovsky
Love Supreme Jazz Festival
East Sussex
July, 2026







Sister Sledge by Tatiana Gorilovsky
Love Supreme Jazz Festival
East Sussex
July, 2026



AYANNA
WITTER-JOHNSON

Photo by Tatiana Gorilovsky

AYANNA WITTER-JOHNSON PIONEER

Ayanna Witter-Johnson, singer-songwriter, cellist, composer and MOBO-nominee has been taking the world by storm since her debut release in 2019, *Road Runner*. An astounding artist. There is something so beautifully electrifying about Ayanna, an energy that exudes from everything she does. She embodies a depth of emotion rarely seen and brings the truth of experiences to audiences in an exciting, powerful and accessible way.

An inspirational storyteller, Ayanna is a master at using music to tell not just her own stories, but narrating the depth of experience of communities across the world. Growing up in a community of creativity, her mother was a dancer in the Ghanaian dance troupe, Aguje and Ayanna was surrounded by dance, poetry readings and the joy of a shared arts space.

Storytelling is definitely a part of my language that I've been able to label in that way as I've gone on and written different types of music, composed, different types of suites, songs, compositions. I can kind of zoom out and say, yes, I definitely have an interest in sharing stories. Partly because my Jamaican heritage has a lot of storytelling - in the folk music, the poetry, in gatherings and sharing stories and even in your own family. I think I've grown up with a language of appreciating the art of storytelling. That makes me feel as though I'm in a community with people.

Performing live is my favourite part of all of this and so, when I'm in the room and I'm

with a live audience and I'm sharing stories, even talking between songs as well as within the songs themselves, it makes me feel as though I'm building a bond between us and a shared space. I just appreciate it. I think we all take something. I don't try to dictate what anyone should take from the stories, but I think there's just always growth and learning. And I think more than anything, growth is probably my biggest passion.

Working in a range of genres and creating a unique and authentic sound, Ayanna brings life to everything she does through her virtuosic tool box – cellist, composer, singer/songwriter, performer. Navigating the different worlds of classical instrumental compositions to lyric-driven songs, Ayanna feels and reacts to the differences and the similarities.

*It is fascinating because I'm still figuring out how and where these two worlds meet. I think the closest that has come for me was working with the LSO Percussion Ensemble on *Ocean Floor*, where it's storytelling and composition, and voice and not voice, all sitting alongside each other in this one project. I think I have to hang on to more than the narrative of the story in the bigger sense when I'm working on a composition, I have to really be inside almost the visual of it - where we're going, what the journey of it is - in order to know how to shape it. I think when you've got words, it's easy to pin an emotion on it and allow the melody to just kind of express that. But without the words to give that clarity, I have to create*

PHOTO BY HYPEMARI



PHOTO BY HYPEMARI



a world for myself. Sometimes, visually, I might draw where the journey is going, or I might have characters, or I might have different movements that will be expressing different things. But it definitely changes. And depending on the instrument you're working with, the way in which the melody is expressed. So, you can kind of live in the land of not being so obvious about how to translate those emotions when you're not adding a lyric to it. There's a different type of freedom. I think when in classical spaces, there's often a programme note, and it's so encouraged to read it and people do read them and they hang on to them. So, I think there's often a slight steer as to where I'm coming from at least. But that doesn't mean that the audience don't take it wherever they want to, which is also great with me.

Ayanna truly comes to life in a live performance setting and the relationship she has with her audiences is palpable. Irrelevant of genre or setting, Ayanna finds the commonality, and forms an unbreakable bond with people.

I think across the board, there's active listening, I would say. People are really tuned in, whether or not they're vocal or they're more quiet and they're letting it wash over them. They are really listening, and I feel that. And I get that because I talk to the audience in between things, and I'm always struck by how open people are emotionally after the show. No matter where I'm performing, I'll always have a deep conversation with someone at the merch stand or by the side of the stage when I'm packing up, or they'll express something in terms of their emotions and their feelings mid-show when I'm talking to the audience. So, I feel like in a lovely way, I just connect with the humanity of whoever's in the room, regardless of what the culture might be around.

Prior to releasing her album *New Roots*

on September 18th, we have been gifted with two singles – ‘Pioneers’ and ‘You Can Have Everything’. Through ‘You Can Have Everything’ Ayanna tells us we can indeed have everything.

I know, it's controversial. I think it was a way of resisting that period where everything was in lockdown and everything was taken away and stripped away and we all had that sense of a lack of freedom and uncertainty and fear. And yes, you can have everything, at least you can imagine it.

‘You Can Have Everything’ is unlike anything on the album. It is my wild card song, kind of fun, slightly scary. I wanted to burst back onto the scene with something just fresh and different, and something you could feel in your body. It was really important that the music felt danceable in this chapter and had a sense of joy. It felt like a risk, but the risk I wanted to take. Making the video was a kind of the embodiment of yes, this is music to be felt in your body on all the levels - and it's fun.

In complete contrast, the powerful second single released, ‘Pioneers’ addresses the plagiarisation of Black culture, cycles of extraction, erasure, and resilience, while affirming for me the foundational role of African cultures in shaping the world as we know it today. Intensity, beauty and light – all part of Ayanna’s artistry.

*It's one of my favourites on the album. It started life when the bass line came to me a few years back when I was on the road with Andrea Bocelli. I expanded it and created the song, a slightly more classicalized version of it for *Ocean Floor* with the LSO percussion ensemble. But I've always felt like it was a standalone song.*

I wanted to produce a version that is closer to what I originally imagined it to be. It's full-on, hard-hitting, straight to the heart of black culture and the exploitation of black

artistry over the years. And it's so daring lyrically. There's a directness, but at the same time, it's observational and it's not saying what I want you to think about it, it's putting the conversation in the room and just saying, there it is.

*How is it that we just keep on giving giving giving yeah
Everything we make becomes a trend you keep on stealing yeah.
Life began with us, we harmonise,
we trust, we live in peace together*

Throughout her work, Ayanna speaks to what needs to be heard, explored and considered. This is one of the many ways she connects with her audiences, an authentic voice, allowing the space for reflection and conversation and importantly, emotion.

It's something that I've always done. I've got a propensity to want to put a hard conversation in the space, but then also in a beautiful way, in a way that people can enjoy on different levels. One of my previous songs, 'Black Panther', is like that. It sounds like a love song, but it's pretty hardcore. I love that people can receive things on different levels. It's almost like protest music, but without shouting. It's a way of having or starting a conversation in a way that feels good.

Releasing on Sept 18th, the upcoming album *New Roots*, is Ayanna's second release. Mostly written during lockdown, it is an album of reflection with themes that fuel Ayanna along with her cello Reuben, who was a 'grounding force' throughout the process.

You can expect more intimacy, more emotions. It's like a cosmic, emotional, revelatory, encouraging, uplifting and healing journey. It's really raw. I was processing a lot because a lot changed for

me in my career from the start of lockdown to now, there was just like a boom in activity in all the ways: compositionally, performance, and touring with Peter Gabriel, touring with Andrea Bocelli, collaborating again with Anoushka Shankar. There were so many different things and releasing my own EPs. I think many of these songs were ways in which I processed a lot of big feelings and changes during that time.

I'm really proud of it. I produced my first album from start to finish. I had an idea, and it's going to soon be in my hands in vinyl format and CD format. I'm just as proud of the journey to this point, as well as the songs themselves. I think if you promise yourself you want to achieve something or release something or do something, and you actually do it, that in itself is already an achievement.

With dates around the world lined up including Bulgaria, London, Italy, Poland and the Netherlands. Ayanna does not stop and knows the challenges of being an artist in today's world.

I have so many challenges but at the same time, I feel so super blessed. I have had and continue to have some wonderful experiences meeting beautiful people, lovely performances. It is just a lot but obviously, I'm happy to do the work.

Some days I wake up, and I have to push myself through, and other days it's easier. But that is what it is. In any field, you're going work hard. You have to put yourself in the center of things. It's exposing, I guess, it's on all the levels, physically demanding, emotionally demanding. You've got all your vulnerabilities for the public to observe and sometimes I do wonder why am I doing this? But I'm very interested in my spiritual life.

I'm not religious, but I definitely believe

PHOTO BY JORDAN WOODS



in a higher power of some sort. I definitely think we're all equal in that regard. So if I'm performing, I'm equal to everyone, and everyone's equal to me. And so there's this sense of shared reverence that I have for the audience. So I'm always humbled if I perform and it resonates with someone, and we have a real connection and just keeping it real with people in life is the most important thing. Whoever you are, wherever you are, I don't care who you are, wherever you are. I'm always looking for the honesty in that interaction. And so I just try and keep myself grounded. Not buying into any sort of like ego inflation, quite honestly.

It is still quite rare to see a cellist at the forefront, and the all-encompassing nature of Ayanna's work enables her to share her work with hugely diverse audiences across the world. With many accolades

and a scholarship programme in her name (The Ayanna Witter-Johnson Rising Star Scholarship) Ayanna is a role model to so many.

There can never be too many positive people in life to look up to and feel inspired by. And if it means that you're following your path and your own journey, and you can learn something from me or take something from me, I am all for it. I love that. I think with putting people on a pedestal, there's a fine line between feeling inspired and idolizing but I think we all need to feel inspired. If you feel brave enough to reach out and ask them for support that's wonderful. So, yeah, I'll take that happily.

For me, authenticity is probably one of the most important aspects of your art history. There is a place for learning from the greats and other musicians and honing your craft and I've spent my fair share of hours listening to Dinah Washington, Nina and everybody. But in terms of your own personal expression, in your own artistry, you have to be brave enough to explore, share, embrace and develop your own sound and to know that that is kind of the beauty of the entire journey, because there's only one of you. Enjoy that pathway of embracing who you are and it can change. It doesn't remain the same, but that's the joy for the audience as well to experience you for who you are. There are lots of ways to do that and now more than ever, it's easier to record yourself. It's probably easier to release music than it ever has been. You don't have to throw yourself into the ring straight away, but your journey and documenting your voice and allowing people to hear you: I think that's really important.

Text by FIONA ROSS

[Ayanna LINKS HERE](#)

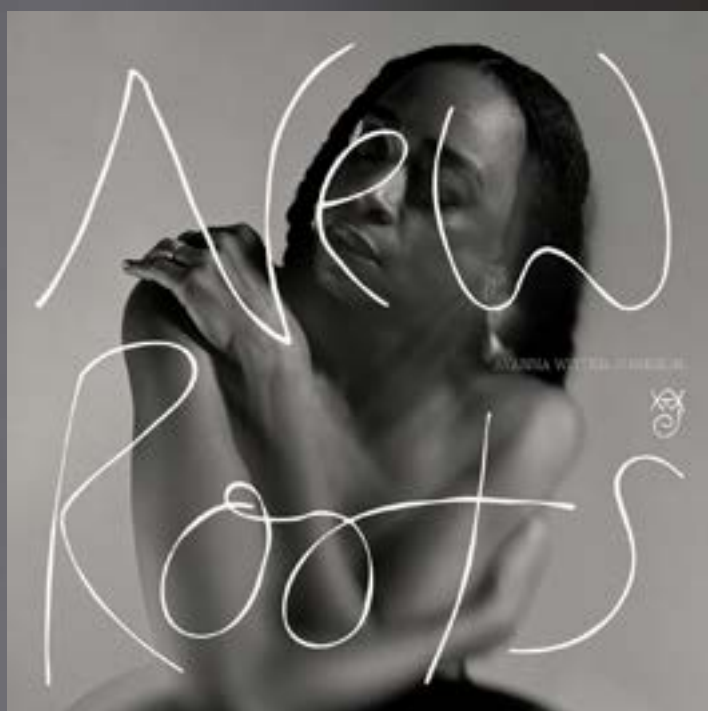




PHOTO BY JORDAN WOODS

Ayanna Witter-Johnson: New Roots First Light
September 16th
Jerwood Hall
London

An immersive evening of music, poetry, dance and conversation, as singer, cellist and composer Ayanna Witter-Johnson launches her tenure as LSO St Luke's Associate Artist with an event inspired by her forthcoming sophomore album, New Roots.

[TICKETS HERE](#)



PHOTO BY MONIKA S JAKUBOWSKA



STORIES OF RESISTANCE, AUTHENTICITY AND KINDNESS

DIANA TORTI
INTERVIEWS.....

PHOTO BY PAOLO SORIANI



ADA MONTELLANICO

Some artists seamlessly weave social and political engagement into their creative work, imbuing their art with a profound sense of humanity and dedication to their community. It is a true honour to interview the accomplished Italian singer Ada Montellanico—an internationally renowned performer of great refinement and sensitivity. Research, generosity, and commitment are the pillars of her work. While a few lines cannot capture the full scope of her career, one only needs to listen to her charming projects to appreciate the depth, intensity, and beauty of her interpretations. Beyond her music, she broke barriers as the first woman to lead the first Italian jazz association, and the first person to serve in an official position within the Ministry of Culture at that level. She is, above all, a powerful source of inspiration and humanity.

DT: Ada, thank you for joining us in the new issue of WiJM magazine. While we've known each other personally for many years and I'm thrilled to call you a dear friend, our readers know you primarily as an internationally renowned artist. Could you tell us a little bit about your background and journey, for those who might be discovering your work for the first time?"

AM: *Thank you so much, my dear Diana. It's a great honor for me to have the opportunity to speak about my career and my musical journey. I began singing almost 40 years ago. At the beginning, I was a popular music singer while studying ethnomusicology at*

university. I was very young, and it was incredibly exciting for me to travel to Southern Italy—and to many other regions as well—searching for our roots and traditional music.

During that time I met many people, including older musicians, and it was a deeply meaningful experience for me. I was both a singer and a percussionist. Everything changed in the mid-1980s, when a friend introduced me to John Coltrane—specifically to My Favorite Things. That album had a profound impact on me. I was truly shocked when I first listened to it: his sound, his creativity... I fell in love with jazz.

I began studying the saxophone for three years, but then I felt the need to continue my journey as a singer. So I enrolled in one of the most important music schools in Rome, the Testaccio School of Music, and from there my career really began. It was an exciting time, because I wanted to explore many different aspects of jazz. I was lucky to have my own trio, and we rehearsed every week, growing together musically.

DT: I've always admired your incredible interpretive skills. You manage to convey a profound, highly personal, and exquisite meaning whenever you tackle a diverse and challenging repertoire (see the Tenco project or Abbey's Road, dedicated to our beloved Abbey Lincoln, and Canto Proibito, to name a few). How do you choose the themes for your projects and how do you develop the musical and vocal work?

AM: *From the very beginning, I have always been interested in discovering new repertoire—not only traditional jazz standards, but also exploring new directions. This kind of research continues to this day. I have always tried to find my own original sound, and I enjoy creating it by choosing particular instruments, and musicians. This approach has led me to my current musical projects and line-ups. I wanted to share the beginning of my musical journey with you, to help you better understand my story.*

To continue my answer, I could say that I follow an inner path. As I mentioned before, I have never been interested in following a traditional route. Instead, I like to invent, to explore other dimensions and new repertoires. This attitude led me, for example, to accept the challenge of working on a tango repertoire. Whenever I approach a project, I love to study and document the historical context, the period, and the musicians I want to pay tribute to.

This was also the case with Luigi Tenco. Before that project, I didn't know his work deeply, but I discovered the beauty and depth of his songs. Recording my first album dedicated to him opened a very special door for me: bringing the Italian language into jazz music. At that time, only a few musicians were exploring how to reinterpret Italian songs in a jazz context. With my first and second albums, I tried to propose a very personal approach—treating Italian songs in the same way as jazz standards. In a sense, this was quite revolutionary.

DT: Your musical research so often shines a light on women, capturing their essence beautifully. You've done this splendidly, portraying extraordinary women (like Abbey's Road in 2017, for example), with the Tribute to Billie Holiday (2008), or with your suggestive work Suono di donna (2012), up to highlighting it with the

courageous project Canto Proibito. As you can imagine, this aligns perfectly with the core vision, initiatives, and activities we champion here at WiJM. Can you tell us more about it?

AM: *Later, I felt the need to focus on the great women of jazz. From around 2010, I began to choose my projects more consciously, giving them a strong social and political meaning. This shift became clear when I recorded my tribute to Billie Holiday, especially through my interpretation of Strange Fruit.*

In that moment, I truly understood that music can carry powerful messages—that we, as musicians, have the responsibility and the possibility to raise awareness about social and political issues, such as racism. After that, I continued with other projects focused on women's roles in music. I wanted to highlight how difficult it still is for women to build a career in certain areas—such as composing, arranging, and musical direction. In one of these projects, I worked exclusively with music written by women from different musical backgrounds and languages.

Then I recorded a very special tribute to a great artist and an extraordinary woman: Abbey Lincoln. Before my project, there had been very few tributes dedicated to her, and I always wondered why she had not received more recognition from other singers. Each of these projects represents a different step in my artistic journey. The tribute to Billie Holiday helped me understand the importance of using music to communicate meaningful messages. Other projects explored gender inequality in the music world and in the arts more broadly.

For example, Canto Proibito was another important chapter in this direction. In this project, I explored the historical condition of women in music, starting from the Baroque era, when women were not



PHOTO BY ELENA SOMARÈ



In music, we have made only small steps forward, and there is still so much to do. Today, many young women musicians are finally choosing instruments that have traditionally been played by men—such as trumpet, trombone, double bass, and drums. However, the situation in Italy is still very behind. In other parts of Europe, things are improving, but in Italy we still have a long way to go. And even where progress exists, it is not enough. We must continue to work harder and harder.

allowed to perform on stage or to be professional musicians. At the same time, this album gave me the opportunity to bring elements of classical music into a jazz language. For these projects, I also developed a very original ensemble, which I first introduced in the tribute to Abbey Lincoln. The line-up is quite unusual: voice, trumpet, trombone, double bass, and drums—without piano, guitar, or any harmonic instrument. This is quite rare for a singer, and it allowed me to create a very distinctive and personal sound.

DT: Looking at the state of women in jazz today, what is your assessment? What has changed in recent years, and what still needs to be done?

AM: *I believe that we have come a long way, but it is still not enough. At the same time, I see a worrying and dangerous situation regarding women who are trying to break free from these ancient ideas about their social role.*

It is something very dark, and deeply inhuman. I feel that we are at a dangerous turning point, where we risk going backwards and losing everything we have achieved in the past. If we think about the number of femicides we are witnessing in this period, it is truly shocking.

DT: You are not only an extraordinary singer and artist, but also as a socially engaged, generous, and deeply committed woman. I know you've held important institutional roles in Italy, significantly contributing to the creation of organizations aimed at ensuring greater oversight and promoting recognition of the role of jazz musicians, an essential requirement in shaping their professional identity too. Getting back to the situation of women in the jazz industry, how much has been achieved in recent years, and how much remains to be done? And how is the situation evolving internationally?

AM: In 2013, my political passion returned, and I decided to become actively involved by creating a jazz association together with other colleagues. They wanted me to take on the role of president. It was a very exciting period for me, but at the same time, I experienced firsthand how difficult it is for a woman to be recognized as a leader—especially when you represent a community largely made up of men.

I was the first woman in Italian jazz to hold such an institutional role, and also the first person—man or woman—to serve in an official position within the Ministry of Culture at that level. I was very proud of this achievement.

I spent 13 years working within the association. It was an intense experience—sometimes difficult, but also incredibly meaningful. It changed me for the better. I feel stronger now. I am no longer afraid.

And I believe that if men do not make space for us in certain careers, then we, as women, must take that space ourselves—despite everything.

This is the only way forward. We cannot wait for someone to give us opportunities. We must believe that we deserve them—and claim them.

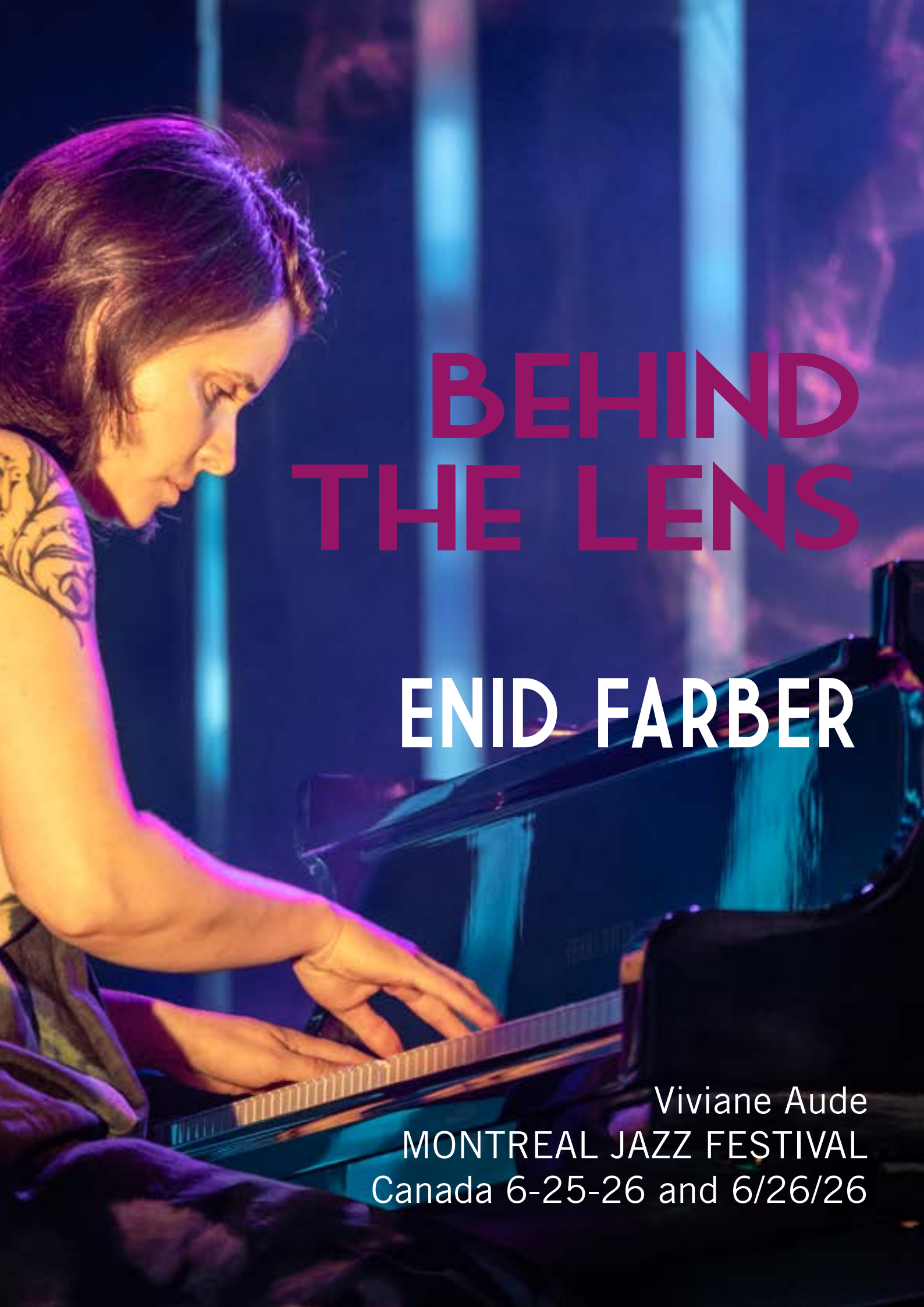
[ADA LINKS HERE](#)



THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

My roundup for summer 2026, at least so far, began on the waterfront, in Weehawken, New Jersey and proceeded with a solo drive to celebrate my birthday, across the border from the U.S. and experience the Montreal Jazz Festival in Canada for the first time. The performer that I most wanted to see, hear and photograph was the singer Lila Downs from Mexico. Lila's lyrics brings out the immigration rights activist deeply entrenched in my heart and soul. From there, my curiosity quenched, I returned to my favorite summer festival in Saratoga, NY where the one named Dianne Reeves was at the head of my priority list. There seems to be a bit of a World Cup 2026 theme that I'm unintentionally formulating here; The U.S., Canada and Mexico are all represented in my photos—the 3 countries that hosted the tournament. And besides The Cup, Wimbledon, The U.S. Open and Le Tour de France, jazz kept me in tune with all that is good, entertaining and right with the world!



A woman with dark hair and a tattoo on her left arm is shown in profile, playing a piano. The scene is lit with dramatic blue and purple stage lights, creating a moody atmosphere. The piano is a dark, polished model.

BEHIND THE LENS

ENID FARBER

Viviane Aude
MONTREAL JAZZ FESTIVAL
Canada 6-25-26 and 6/26/26

Josiane Rouette, appearing with Salin
MONTREAL JAZZ FESTIVAL
Canada 6-25-26 and 6/26/26









Mexican singer Lila Downs performing
on opening night, June 25th, of the
2026 Montreal Jazz Festival. And
rumor has it right, it WAS my big 7-OH
birthday!!!

SALIN
MONTREAL JAZZ FESTIVAL
Canada 6-25-26 and 6/26/26



DIANNE REEVES
SARATOGA JAZZ FESTIVAL,
NY 6-28-26



Hilaria Cacao of CimaFunk
SARATOGA JAZZ FESTIVAL
NY 6-28-26









Kate Baker, her dog, a fan, a cyclist, Rachel
Z. Hakim and Evan Gregor
SUNSET JAZZ SERIES,
Weehawken, NJ 6-18-26



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 IT WILL INSPIRE YOU, AS THE ARTISTS WHO I'M INTERVIEWING ARE INSPIRING ME:

GERMANA

PHOTO BY MONIKA SJAKUBOWSKA

KEYNA WILKINS

One of the most impressive things that I see around me when it comes to working in the music business these days, is the courage of carrying on (...no matter what!) and taking complete control of your own career. Even if this might sound obvious for some, it's not and it's not easy. Musicians are called to be their own businesses, 360 degrees: writing music, producing, managing social media and promotion, booking gigs and more. The "to do" list is extensive and exhausting, most of all for independent artists.

That's why, when I first read about Australian/British composer-musician Keyna Wilkins, I stopped once again to appreciate the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes, most of all for a mother who decides to refuse any kind of external control of her own artistic matters in order to stay completely true to herself.

Keyna was one of three finalists for the Australian Art Music Awards for Individual Excellence in 2021 and 2018 (APRA/AMCOS) and, since going independent, she has released 15 albums, performed internationally and founded and led two ensembles: Sydney space jazz outfit, Ephemera, praised for their immersive and multi-sensory live performances and the most recent Armistice Flutes, a contemporary music ensemble committed to spreading peace through their own compositions and improvisations.

The Armistice Flute Group (that has also performed at Gaza charity fundraiser

events) recorded their debut album "Hope" in December 2025. The music beautifully blends traditional Western classical techniques, experimental acoustics, and global folk elements and was released with the noble intent to donate all profits to the Palestinian Children's Relief Fund. Keyna's latest release with Ephemera is their third album, "Start Opus" whose music launches the listener into space, featuring real NASA recordings merged together with contemporary jazz and classical elements, and performed to projections of space.

Kudos to Keyna for single-handedly bringing to life her visions, with bravery, freedom and artistic sense... all while being a mother of twins!

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

A big inspiration for me was Jamie Baum - an American jazz flutist. I saw her perform in the UK in 2006 and it was the first time I'd seen live jazz flute. It was just so exciting and different to anything I'd seen before! Also she was leading her own quartet - which was unusual back then.

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

At the moment I have many female role models in the Australian jazz music scene which I am part of: Andrea Keller, Sandy Evans, Jenny Eriksson, Jenna Cave and Kristin Berardi. And in the international



Photo by Shane Rozario

PHOTO BY TAWFIK ELGAZZAR



music scene, I learn a lot from watching my friend and colleague Chloé Charody build her ambitious large-scale opera and ballet projects over multiple continents as well as the humanitarian projects she runs in Gaza that I have helped fundraise for.

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

I had a flute teacher at Bath Spa University in 2002 called Richard Dobson who was the first teacher I had who really encouraged me to simply follow my gut feelings about music rather than needing approval or validation from authority figures. This set me on my path of composition and spontaneous improvisation. In 2007 I learnt from Nicolas Vallis-Davis who also told me to not worry about studying further and just keep writing music and keep being creative.

These are tips I still follow.

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 feel proud that I am a fiercely independent composer, musician and teacher, wife and mother of twins who runs 6 bands that are all very successful including a few international tours. I am beholden to no-one and I am 100% freelance. I started getting organised about my music in 2015. A few years after I had my twins. I believe having children really galvanized my momentum and made me realise what is important. And for me in music the most important thing is to feel true to myself, and making ensembles and albums of my original music is the path that felt right. Record labels

were going bust at that time, so I decided to become completely independent. I personally organise recording, producing, mastering, mixing, selling, reviews, gigs, promotions of all my albums. So far I have made 15 albums, all of which have been very successful, getting national and international rave reviews and some have been toured internationally - most recently a tour of Japan. There is an immense freedom in being completely independent. I believe I can make anything happen with enough work!

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

My latest release is called "Star Opus" from my jazz quartet Ephemera. This is Ephemera's 3rd album and my 15th album. Ephemera play my compositions inspired by astronomy, and ensemble improvisations set to real NASA space sounds captured from planets and stars, curated and compiled by astronomer Professor Paul Francis. We have played in many venues around Australia and Japan, often using NASA projected spacescapes creating immersive multi-sensory experiences. Stylistically, this ensemble traverses jazz, classical and experimental forming a crossover effect that is something that I feel is truly unique, organically reacting to stellar concepts to explore themes of the universe and universality.

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

My collaborators on Star Opus are Elsen Price (double bass), Will Gilbert (trumpet) and Jodie Michael (drumset). I met Elsen about 13 years ago when we worked together on a Colombian latin jazz project in Sydney. He asked me if I had ever composed anything for double bass, I said

"No, but I'd like to". Since then I have written several large solo double bass pieces for him and we have been frequent collaborators on many projects. He can play any style and is an excellent improviser! I met Will Gilbert through Elsen. Will is a jazz trumpeter with an ethereal, wistful tone that I find totally unique. We all have kids now so rehearsals are less frequent but somehow when we do get together, it's very productive and meaningful. We added Jodie Michael to the mix only last year when we decided to try to change up our sound a little to make it more energetic. Jodie has a wonderful subtle and nuanced touch on the drum set and enhances the overall affect.

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

"Stellar Parallax" is a 4 bar bebop-influenced melody that I composed in 2022. The whole piece is endless improvisations that link back to this original melody - improvisations using different aspects such as the intervals, the rhythm etc. As I work with such excellent intuitive improvisors, I feel the music flowed effortlessly in the recording room and I love the result.

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?

I think a lot of gender-related problems disappear when you become completely independent. In Sydney, more and more women are in positions of power and I personally don't feel being a woman is an issue these days.

GSLs: How do you deal with preconceptions of genre?



I often refer to my music as "crossover" or "multi-genre" to get around this problem. I was classically trained in Sydney Conservatorium, Bath Spa University and Bristol University, and jazz trained in Hildesheim, Germany, and have taught myself many different genres on top of that from folk to latin-jazz to and free improvisation, and all this comes out in my music. I feel the term "crossover" really does apply.

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

In Australia it is very challenging to make money from music unless you teach. So I have 47 private piano and flute students aged 3-78. It's ok and mostly I enjoy teaching. But with my own kids as well, I have limited energy and time to create, promote and organise my original projects. This is the same for many musicians I know. It would be fantastic if there was more financial support for musicians, as I know how much, real genuine original live music can bring to people's lives in this world of screen-addiction.

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

I would love to take my bands overseas for more international touring. Europe and more of Asia would be fantastic. As I mentioned, I recently toured Japan with my band Ephemera and would love more of that! I love connecting with people from other cultures and learning about music in their country and collaborating with local musicians.



[KEYNA LINKS HERE](#)

PHOTO BY GEORGE XENEKIS



PAULETTE JACKSON COMMUNITY HERO

Paulette Jackson is an incredible community hero. As an author, Founder/Creative Director of SCORP Lady Ventures and Jazz Zone Radio, radio host, writer, editor and WJM team member, she is a fierce advocate of the music community. She uses all her platforms to share artists, support their work and often does so without praise or thanks and it is high time her tireless commitment to us all is shouted about. With so much going on in the world and the challenges of life and work, Paulette finds inspiration and grace in music and this in turns inspires us all to do the same.

We are grateful to have Paulette in our team and thought it was high time we shared her work with you all.

Paulette has published four books *My Test(Imony)*, *Heaven's Choir ~ Part 1*, *The Music Through the Storm* and *The Music in Me*, sharing her thoughts and passion for arts and how music has shaped her and helped her fight challenges. Embedded in all her work is her hope that her experiences will support and inspire others.

We would love to hear about your journey to becoming a writer. Can you tell us how you first started writing?

Well, actually I started writing song lyrics at the age of ten. Music has always been my first love and writing lyrics started because I would come up with a melody and started jotting down the words. How I started writing books was because a high school friend of mine had written his first book and

*encouraged me to tell my story by writing my first book. Believe it or not, Sheila E. also encouraged me to write as she had released her book years ago and I was fortunate enough to attend her book signing and meeting her!! I had already started writing but my friend and Ms. E inspired me to finish it. I also wrote an article for the music magazine *Right On!* but it never got published. The rest is history!*

We have your books on our 'On The Bookcase' feature. Can you speak to your journey from your first book to your most recent one? How has your experience as a writer developed?

My journey as an author has been an exciting and challenging one. I had to think about how much I wanted to share in my first book, it was about my love and passion for music and the arts and how it started for me. It was personal and I felt kind of vulnerable but it also was therapeutic. Since that first book, I feel I've learned a lot about writing and discovered my own style. I've come a long way since my first book and even have branched out to writing for magazine publications to writing music reviews! I am proud of what I've accomplished thus far and have another book waiting to be published next year! I have even put together a self-publishing toolkit for other aspiring authors and I do consulting.

You have an incredible portfolio career which also includes your work with SCORP Radio Network and Jazz Zone Radio. Can you tell us about your radio work?

When I was in high school, friends suggested I look into getting into radio, they felt I had the voice for it. I thought about it but, regrettably I didn't pursue it, I didn't have enough confidence and patience to see it through. Many years later, frustrated with working a 9 to 5 life and not pursuing any of my passions, was starting to really get to me so, a high school friend suggested combining my love of music and my voiceover career and create a radio show! I was nervous about doing it but I finally decided to pursue it and reached out to another dear friend who is a recording artist (we also went to high school) who at the time had his own internet radio show, and told him my idea for my own show. He introduced me to the station owner where his show was being aired and a couple of months later, my first show aired: a Prince tribute show (he had just passed). My show was called The Classic Soul Music Cafe and it started as a one hour show and eventually as it became more popular, other stations, including overseas, asked me to take it to a two-hour show! My show went from one station to over 20!

Another dear friend and mentor, who has sadly since passed away, encouraged me to start my own radio station (my show aired on his station as well) so, I thought about it and about a year later, SCORP Radio Network was born and I was excited to have created my own station! Then another year later I decided to start another station dedicated to all Jazz music; Jazz Zone Radio! The idea for Jazz Zone Radio came from another show I created called The Jazz Zone. I decided to stop my shows and then later decided to end the stations. It was a lot of work and very time consuming but I thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it. I wanted to concentrate on other creative ventures and I was starting to travel more, so I had to let it go. It was a great ride!

Life can be a challenge! What keeps you focused and inspired?

Often I have to remind myself of the work I've done and what I've accomplished along the way. There were days when I wanted to give up because I didn't think I was getting enough support, but then I'd get a message or call from artists or fans of my shows, etc. to let me know how much they appreciated my work and what I've done, and it pushed me to continue on and to remember why I started in the first place: love for music and the arts! Other creatives have also encouraged and inspired me to keep pushing forward and I truly appreciate that kind of support!

You are an incredible champion for the music community across the world. How important is community to you?

Community has become even more important to me, especially with the amazing connections I've made over the last few years. *It's important especially in our industry, to support and advocate for each other.*

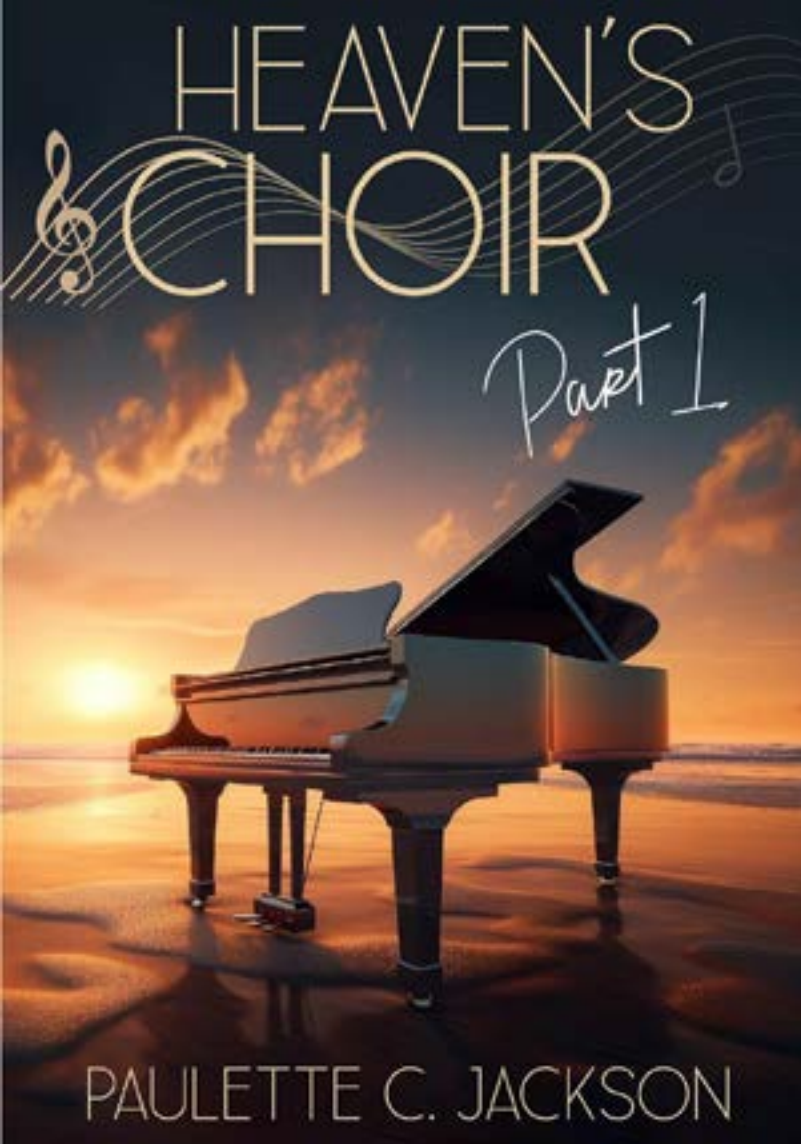
Can you tell us about any projects you are working on at the moment or coming up soon?

As I mentioned earlier, I have another book I would like to release next year and I also am looking to get more into public speaking. I'm also working on launching another business venture which I've already been doing for quite some time but looking to expand and go public soon.

You often write about women who have inspired you. Who are some of the women who are your role models or who inspire you?

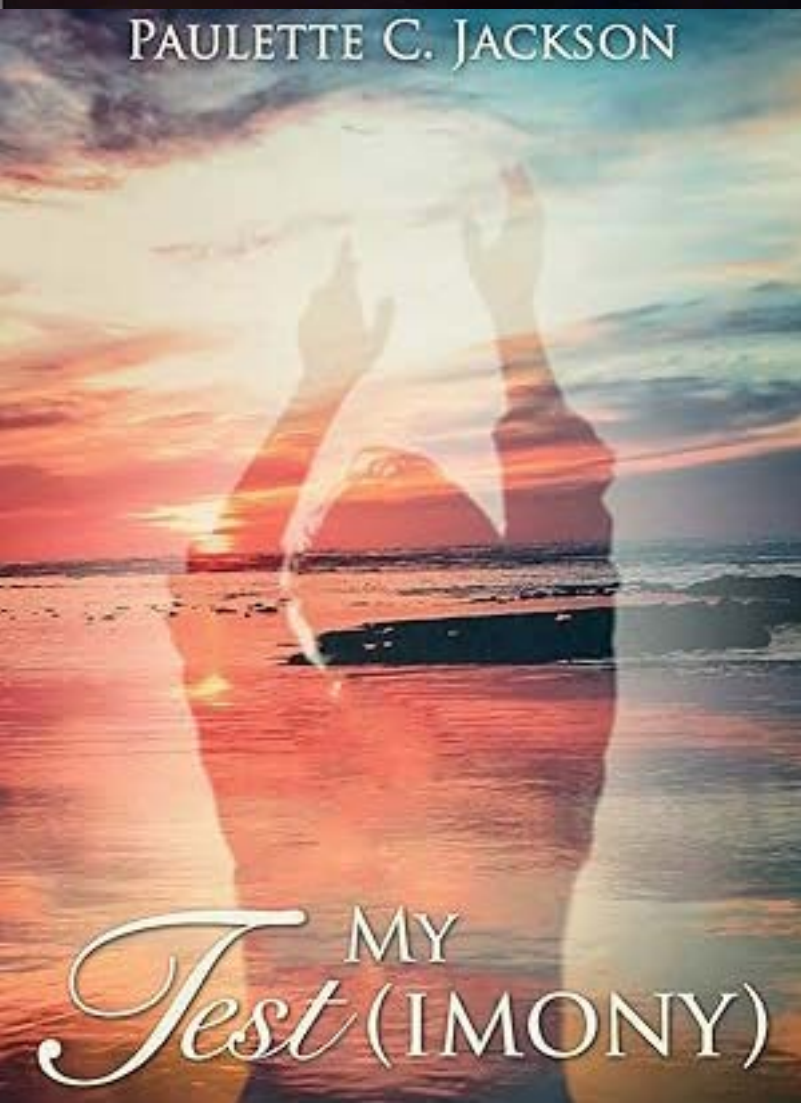
Wow! So many. Maya Angelou, Sheila E., Toni Morrison. But, there are non-famous





PAULETTE C. JACKSON

PAULETTE C. JACKSON



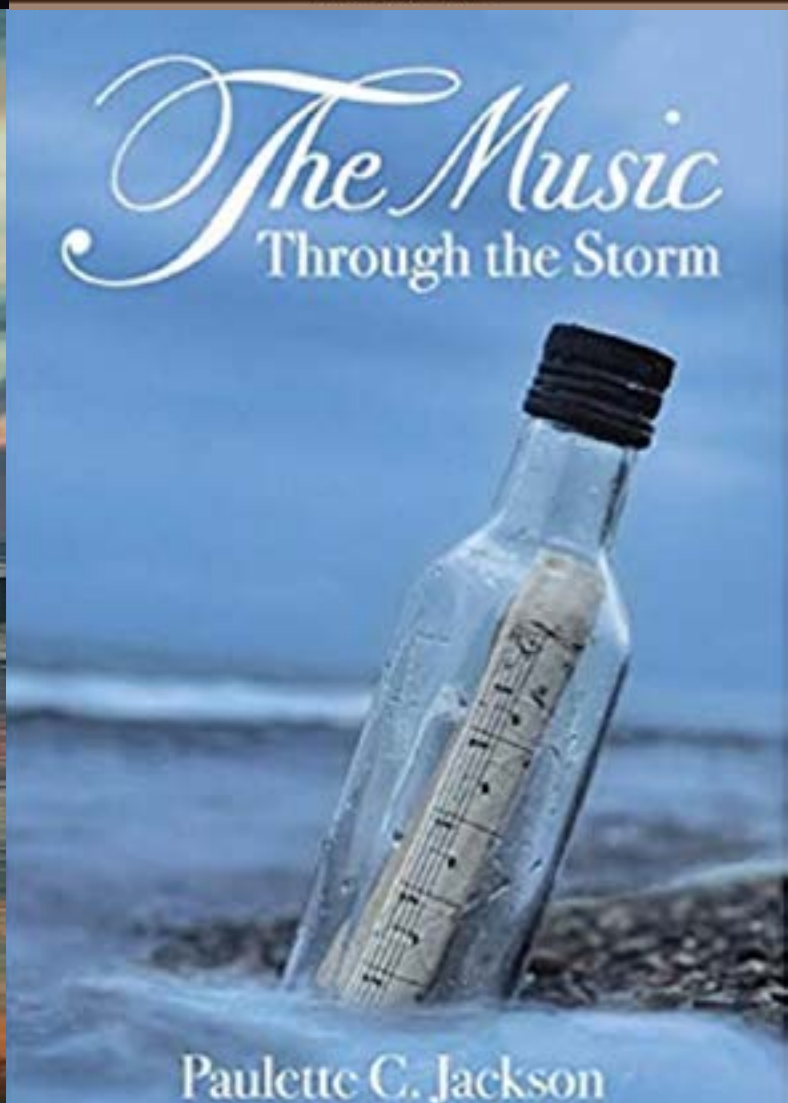
MY
Test (IMONY)



The Music in me

Paulette C. Jackson

2ND EDITION



The Music Through the Storm

Paulette C. Jackson

women that inspire me as well, you of course, Fiona and a dear friend who is a graphic designer and super marketing expert, Sherita Carthon, Yulia and so many others. I have learned that I have inspired other women as well which is so amazing to me!

Do you have any words of wisdom or guidance for any writers?

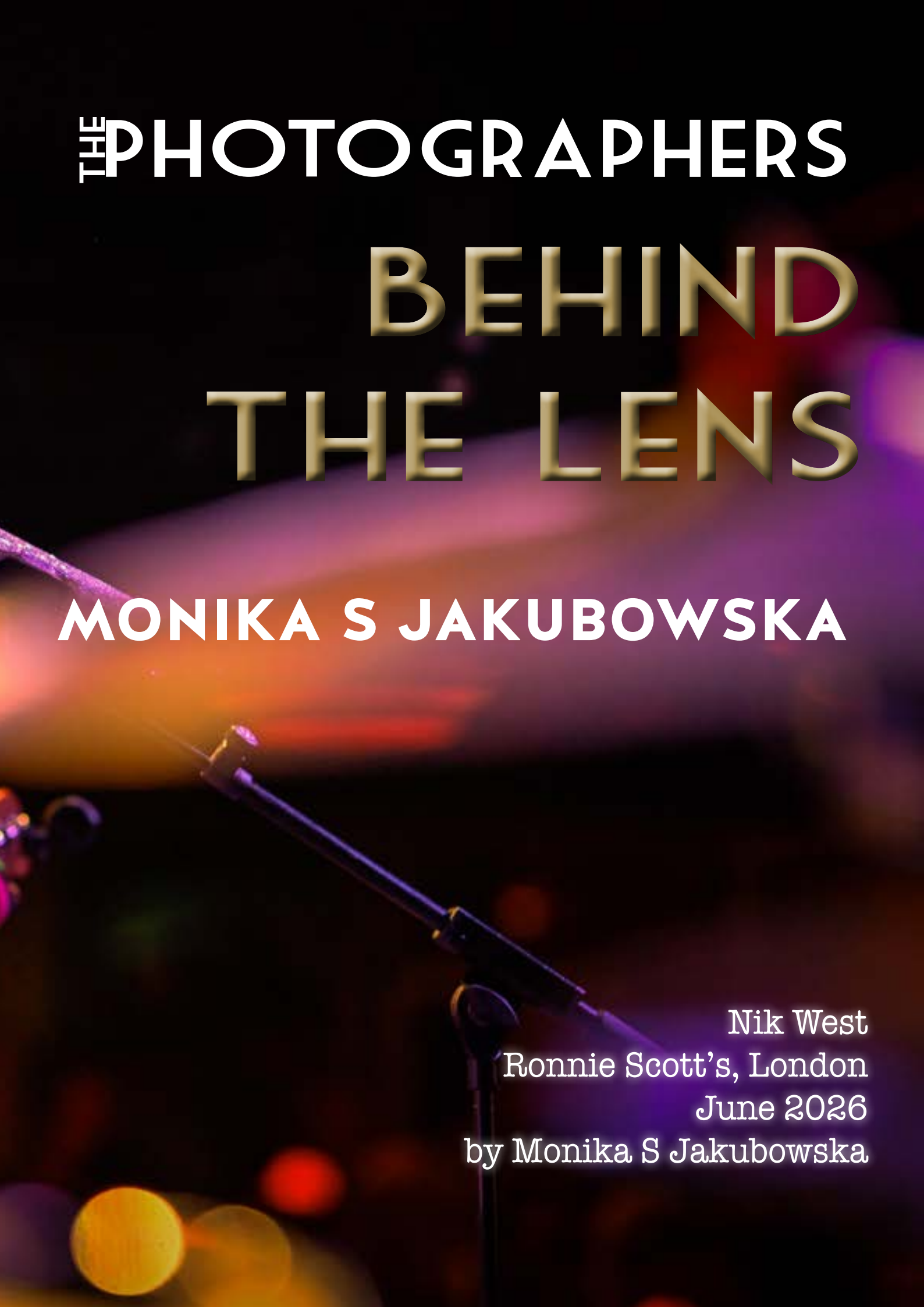
Be true to who you are and know what you want to say as a writer. Don't be afraid to explore and learn from others but don't try to imitate anyone, do you, and expand your knowledge and embrace new ideas. Just start, stop making excuses of why you haven't started. Jot down ideas, keep a notebook and pen handy, you never know when the inspiration will hit you, be ready!



[Paulette links click here](#)

All photos by Robert Banks





THE PHOTOGRAPHERS BEHIND THE LENS

MONIKA S JAKUBOWSKA

Nik West
Ronnie Scott's, London
June 2026
by Monika S Jakubowska

Nik West
Ronnie Scott's, London
June 2026
by Monika S Jakubowska





Nik West
Ronnie Scott's, London
June 2026
by Monika S Jakubowska





Mohini Dey
Ronnie Scott's, London
May 2026
by Monika S Jakubowska





Mohini Dey
Ronnie Scott's, London
May 2026
by Monika S Jakubowska





NOVA
#25





Mohini Dey
Ronnie Scott's, London
May 2026
by Monika S Jakubowska





Caroline Shaw & Andrew Yee
Kings Place, London
May 2026
by Monika S Jakubowska



Andrew Yee
Kings Place, London
May 2026
by Monika S Jakubowska



Caroline Shaw & Andrew Yee
Kings Place, London
May 2026
by Monika S Jakubowska







“JAZZ IS THE STUFF OF LIFE”

JUMOKÉ FASHOLA ON JAZZ, MEDIA, AND THE ART OF INTERVIEWING

BY ALICE HILL

Famed journalist, vocalist, broadcaster, actress, live literature curator and all round tour de force Jumoké Fashola shared with me the many ways in which her professional and personal life have been entangled with jazz music. From the sort of meta conversation about interviews within an interview, to touching anecdotes about her first moments of jazz listening, Fashola has a palpably engaging and elegant way of conveying her thoughts and experience. Though it is just one of the hats she wears, when I think of women in jazz media, she is the first to come to mind.

Think of your favourite current jazz artist; Jumoké Fashola has probably interviewed them. The likes of Jon Batiste, Bobby McFerrin, and Dianne Reeves have all been in conversation with Fashola over the years, to name some of her highlights. This time, I had the pleasure of interviewing her.

The art of interviewing, in Jumoké Fashola's words, is “an imprecise science”. In an era saturated with short-form content, Fashola reminds us that to have a longer amount of time with an artist is a luxury. She advises that a journalist's responsibility is to “know about the subject they are talking about” and “to show appreciation for the music.” Building on this: “often, the art of the interview is how you connect with the person that you are interviewing”, and

the journalist should know when they have “tapped in” to the interviewee as a person.

For Fashola, interviews are always about the moment where the interviewee says “I've never thought about that before” as “that's really where [the interview] begins”. Fashola doesn't stick to the press release, she will ask things about the artist that intrigue her, that she wants to know more about.

During an interview with Chaka Khan live at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club, Fashola enquired about a story regarding something along the lines of Khan, a gun, and a lover: “she looked me in the eye and said ‘you really know me!’, and I said ‘I don't know you Chaka I just want to know about this situation!’ The story came out and she told it brilliantly. [...] Everybody has a little anecdote or detail that tells you a bit about why this artist might be the way they are.” Sometimes, for Fashola, interviews are all about surprising the artist, not with a “gotcha” moment, but by curating a moment of unexpected stories, information, or ideas. Fashola states that “the artist should be the one that sparkles - that's my job”; “my job is to be a conduit for who you are as a human being.”

If there is one thing that Jumoké Fashola would change about jazz media, it's that there should be more of it. When I asked

her thoughts on the landscape of jazz media today, she responded:

“I’m just grateful that people are covering jazz. [...] Although it is a music that continually shifts and morphs into different forms, but really is still attached to its roots, and therefore will always exist, getting it covered can be tricky.”

When she saw a landmark concert featuring Theon Cross, Gary Bartz, Ego Ella May at Southbank Centre last month, she described it as “extraordinary”, “so exciting”, and that Bartz was “playing like he’s in his 20s”. Blown away by the performance, Fashola was left with the question “who is covering this?” Fashola shared that she gets excited when she does see a jazz artist on the broadsheets during her Sunday morning show on BBC Radio London, as they are often absent from wider media. She emphasises how both traditional and social media need to be harnessed to best serve the artists at stake.

There are two key challenges to jazz media that Fashola acknowledges: one is the existence of a “silo of musicians” that are covered, giving the illusion that there is “so much going on”, so all the excitement is centred around the same collection of artists, until you get a band like Ezra Collective that “breaks it out”.

The second challenge is one of accessibility. Fashola stated that the word “jazz” can feel “alienating”: “like oh it’s jazz, like it’s this odd beast of music that you need a PhD to understand, which is not true at all. But if your first encounter with jazz is something quite intricate, it can be challenging. [...] We need to work harder and make it accessible. [...] That’s why it’s so lovely when we get breakthrough artists like Nubya Garcia.” Fashola names contemporary British jazz giants Ezra Collective and Nubya Garcia as artists who, in the nature of their work, demand change

in the landscape of jazz media.

Fashola is not just a woman in jazz media, she has a portfolio career that spans theatre, TV, singing, broadcasting, and journalism: “my passion basically is my work.” She clarified: “I am a jazz journalist, but it’s not the only thing I do. [...] There are people who specifically focus on jazz; I am not one of those people. I write about jazz, I broadcast about jazz, I’m a huge cheerleader for jazz, but I wouldn’t put myself in just one box.” Some of the jazz journalists that Fashola admires are Peter Jones of Jazzwise magazine who “writes phenomenally for jazz vocalists”, and Ted Gioia, whose substack “The Honest Broker” is, in her mind, a work of “genius”. Fashola is particularly inspired by the way Gioia describes the “interrelation of life and music”:

“What I like about Ted is he just takes strands from everywhere. [...] [Writing] is ephemeral anyway, music is down to personal taste [...] You are being the critic. I don’t care what anyone says, you are never neutral. [...] But I think that’s why I like jazz because jazz is the stuff of life if you are willing to listen to it. Jazz is that moment of heartbreak, jazz is that moment of joy, jazz is the middle of the night where nothing is going around. It’s all of that, and pulling those elements into writing, for me, makes it sizzle.”

The entanglement of jazz and life began for Jumoké Fashola in Nigeria during her university days.

“When I was in university, this was in Nigeria, I had a boyfriend who every week would bring me a sort of mixtape and go ‘listen to this, listen to it and decide bits that you like and bits that you don’t like.’ So it would be anything, it would be a John Coltrane, it would be Sarah Vaughan, it would be Ornette Coleman, it would just be all of these people that he’d put on one CD and go ‘have a listen’. And so some of



it I loved, some of it I hated, a lot of it, it was the first time I'd really heard jazz. [...] That's how I came to jazz, like this music that was completely unknown to me, that had no societal connection to me at the time. [...] Slowly but surely it pulled me in."

Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew* became a favourite record of hers, along with the work of Carmen McRae.

"I like that passion that Carmen McRae brings to the music, she has a way of, it makes you feel like 'oh yeah she means what she's saying'. [...] Carmen had to work for it, I like musicians who have to work for their music. I like knowing that you are working really hard; I like to see my musicians sweat."

Across her singing and hosting careers, there are resemblances to a history of Black British art movements. I asked Fashola: as someone who spent a significant part of her life in Nigeria, do you feel connected to Black British jazz movements, or is your jazz background more informed by Nigerian scenes?

"I think it's probably more connected to the scene there [in Nigeria]. [...] The music I was hearing was definitely more African, so when I think about it, I love African jazz probably for that reason. There is a cadence and a rhythm that is inherent in the music that you often pick up. That's why for instance I love talking drums, you know, there's a tonality within the music that I think is very rooted in Africa. So, as much as I love British jazz, if you were talking about my roots, the influence has definitely come from that.

I mean the first time I ever sang a jazz song, which was 'Summertime' at my distant uncle's jazz club, [...] even with that it was still about the drums and that rhythm and it was all of that kind of stuff.

So when I listen to somebody like Nduduzo Makhathini, for instance, you know that music will always move me because there's something about the roots in that, for sure."

Jumoké Fashola is listening to Ego Ella May, Cécile McLorin Salvant, Nina Simone, and the album *Sopranista* by Samuel Mariño at the moment, saying that "I just listen to music that moves me." There are whispers in the wind of a new broadcasting project from Fashola which will synthesise the many threads of her career:

"Radio Auntie is a new platform I'm developing, based on my years behind and in front of the mic and a career spanning news, jazz, theatre, ethics, religion, and live on-air conversations. Still pre-launch, it marks a natural next chapter—expanding my on-air practice into mentorship, insight, and a commitment to championing other voices."

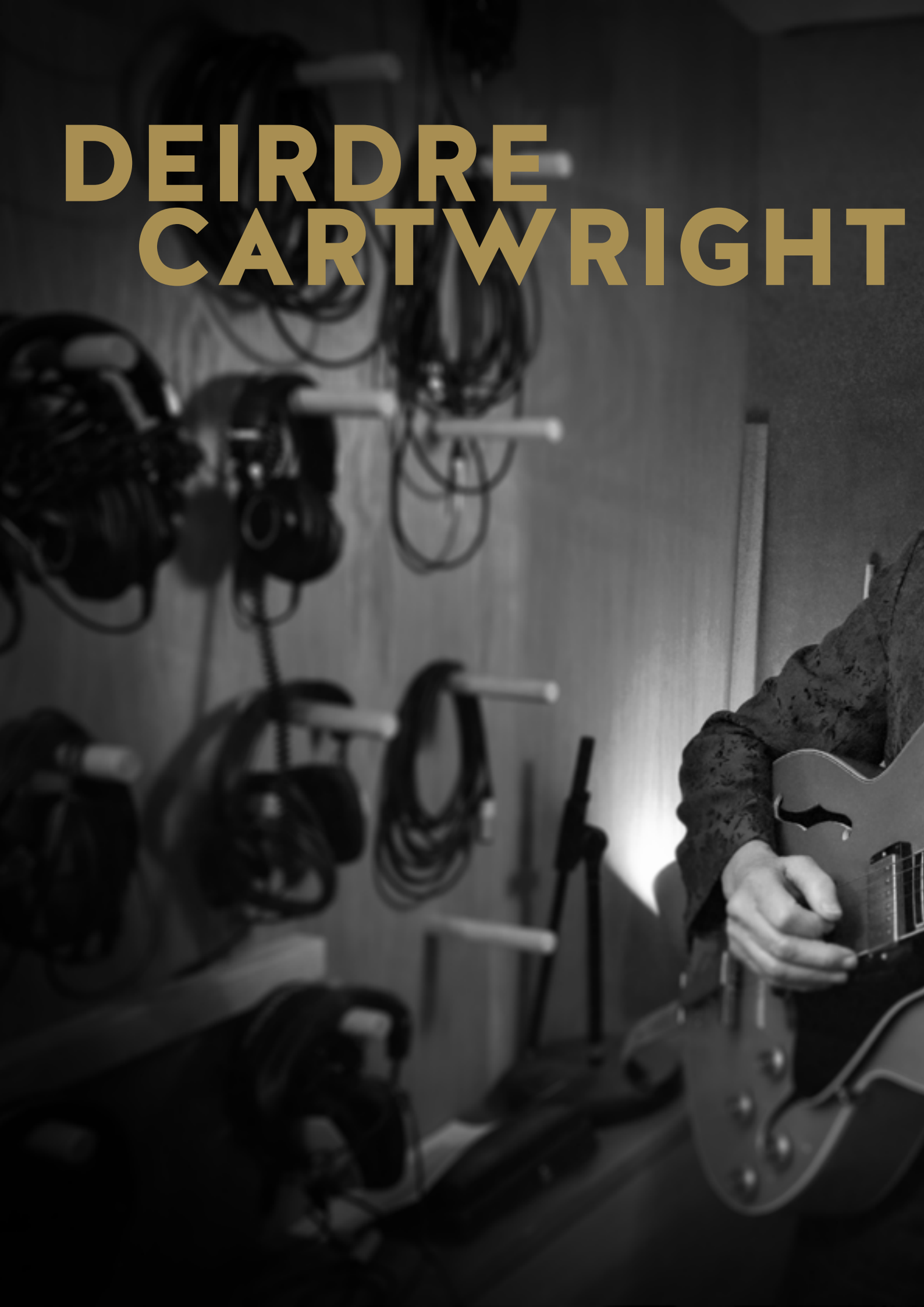
Tune in to Jumoké Fashola's BBC Radio London shows on Friday afternoons and Sunday mornings!

Photos provided by Jumoké Fashola

[Jumoké click links here](#)



DEIRDRE CARTWRIGHT





ALL PHOTOS BY POLLY HANCOCK

DEIRDRE CARTWRIGHT GUITAR VANGUARD

Deirdre Cartwright, multi award-winning guitarist and composer turns 70 this month. In a career that has so far seen her touring over 17 countries including performing with the all women Afro-Latin Jazz group, The Guest Stars, recording countless albums as leader and in ensemble and working with ARQ (Alison Rayner Quintet), she also co-founded the groundbreaking Blow the Fuse, with Alison Rayner, an inspirational organisation supporting the jazz community with a range of female-led initiatives through live music nights and a label. Deirdre continually leads the way and has forged her own path motivating countless artists, especially guitarists and especially women.

Deirdre celebrates her 70th birthday milestone with a brilliant new album *Organik* featuring Pete Whittaker on Hammond organ and Gary Hammond on percussion. Reflecting on the guitarists that have resonated with her, along with some new material, Deirdre says that she 'made this album for me'.

I always see this beautiful new empowerment that comes especially to women as they get older, where they appear to be so much freer to enjoy life and be true to who they are. There is a beautiful mischievous sparkle in the eyes of women as they grow into their experience.

Absolutely. When you're a young woman you are not really thinking so much of the

ageing process, but when you get into your late thirties, forties, it kind of creeps up on you and you suddenly think, oh, I'm not a young woman anymore - I'm an old woman. But then by the time you reach 70, you've gone beyond all of that. I just feel very relaxed and fairly content with who I am. I'm not perfect. I'm not the best player in the world, but I'm just enjoying playing and so enjoying being part of this community. My first and foremost thing is playing the guitar, and I still love it. I love playing it every day, and as I've got older, I've got better, which is really great. I feel very lucky that I haven't had any problems with my fingers and I'm still able to play and practice. The other thing is that as I've got older I'm not so bothered about what other people think of me. As a young woman, being a guitarist as well, I was so aware of being watched and being criticized and I've just become more relaxed about that as I've got older.

Having played the guitar for nearly 60 years, the guitar is at the heart of everything Deirdre does.

'If there is a more complete guitarist in contemporary music than Deirdre Cartwright – I'd like to know who it is' Dave Gelly, The Observer

The new album *Organik*, out this month reflects on some of the guitarists that have influenced her playing including Wes Montgomery, Luiz Bonfá and Emily Remler.



PHOTO BY POLLY HANCOCK



PHOTO BY POLLY HANCOCK

This is Deirdre's first album as a leader in 15 years, but that is certainly not because she has been taking a rest!

I led my own bands from the early nineties right the way through to the last album around 2011. I think everyone should take a turn at being a leader. As the leader, you have to arrange everything - all the gigs, the photos, the publicity.... everything. And being a promoter gives you a tremendous insight into how music works. I think it makes you very respectful of band leaders, but it is a lot of pressure.

My dear friend, bass player/writer Alison Rayner, said to me that she was thinking about forming her own band (this was about 2013) and I'd like you to be in it. I remember thinking, it's come at just the right time, because I'm feeling a bit worn out from leading bands. We also were part of Blow the Fuse at the time, promoting gigs and putting on lots of different gigs with different people. So, it was the right time for me. ARQ (Alison Rayner Quintet) went on to record four albums and I love playing in ARQ I love being in the band, and I love being the guitarist in that group.

I also play with Carol Grimes, and lead a band with Annie Whitehead, and we do different projects, so for me, it was just taking the pressure off. But then a couple of years ago, I started to get much more into playing what I'd call classic jazz guitar, the albums with my group were, I suppose what you'd call more of a fusion kind of music, fusion jazz. I started to really enjoy playing with my Archtop guitar, playing jazz standards, and the Great American Songbook. I love tunes and I love songs. I'm not a singer but if I had been a decent singer, I probably wouldn't have developed the guitar as much.

Do you really think that?

Yes, I really do. When I started off as a

teenager playing the guitar, I was asked all the time, when I'd turn up with my guitar, are you the singer? Or, oh, you sing and play the guitar? I always had to say, no, but they'd say, but you do sing? If I had a good voice, I don't think I would have developed my solo playing, but because I couldn't sing, I would play the solos, and then I discovered I could play the melodies on the guitar, so that's really how it all started.

Well, thank goodness, you can't sing! The press release for your new album states that you 'made this album for me'. What is it about this album that was so personal to you?

Well, I suppose first of all, it's working with Pete Whittaker and Gary Hammond. I've worked with Pete over the last two or three years, and we both love that kind of fifties, sixties jazz guitar organ sound, that jazz with a bit of blues, bit of Latin in it. My first instrument was piano, and he plays guitar so we've both got an insight into each other's instruments and the piano and the organ work really well together.

I bumped into Gary Hammond at a gig and Gary used to be in my band in the nineties when he lived in London, but he started touring with The Beautiful South and moved up to Hull. Gary and I just clicked. We have the same sense, the same energy. It's a very bright and optimistic - let's do this! - you know?

So, I thought, let's book Gary, because he plays congas and percussion too and he's a great performer. So, we did, and it all just clicked. It was just like that. People have said, why did you call it Organik, well it was really organic! I didn't sit there with a list and think, who do I want to play in this group? I was playing with Pete, Gary came up, and it just clicked. A couple of gigs came in and then I said, I think we should record an album and that's how it happened.

I love working with them. They're very nice people to work with. There's not a problem with anything. Whenever I say, oh, could we do a version of this? What do you think about this? They will say, yes, let's try it. It's a can-do attitude, which I really like. I'm not creating problems. It's problem solving. I like all that stuff. I also think for me, it allowed me to celebrate a lot of different guitarists who have been influences of mine as well.

Six of the nine tracks on the album are interpretations of some tracks rarely presented in the jazz scene, along with some well-known tracks including Eleanor Rigby and On Green Dolphin Street. How did you select the material? Was that also an organic process or did you have some specific ideas going into it?

Yes, that was quite organic. Somebody said to me that it must have taken a really long time to work out what to play, and well, no, not really! It was kind of, I like this one, I like this one, what do you think, let's try this. The only thing I brought in for the album was Sultan's Of Swing, which is the Dire Straits number. I loved it when it came out in the 80s and always liked that track but I had never played it. I was just mucking around with my guitar, and I thought of the title and thought, isn't it funny that it was a song written about a jazz group in South London, and it's got swing in the title, but it's a country rock kind of track. There's no reference to jazz in the music. I thought maybe I could swing the Sultans of Swing! I was playing around with the chords, and I thought, if you play it in a slightly different way, take a slightly different approach of playing the solo and I could hear much more of a Latiny kind of groove in it. When I say Latiny, I was thinking of a kind of Mexican village, town, sun-baked... I just had a vision in my head of how it would work, the atmosphere of the track. So, we tried it, and it worked, so I went, right, okay, we're doing that one!

And you've also included three of your own compositions – One For Polly, Mango Bango and Espresso Martino.

I was over in Bequia, a little island just south of Saint Vincent in the Caribbean and I had been there on holiday the year before and met a load of musicians. Last year, I played with them at the Bequia Blues and Jazz Festival which happens in January, and it's the time when the mango trees are all very ripe and the fruit was banging down on the roofs, great big mangoes were falling 30, 40 foot! We were standing outside one day, just outside in the road, not even realizing, and this mango just went wham, and just came right down and somebody said, "Mango, bango!" And I went, that's a title, I'm going to write a track for that. It's a very happy and joyous track. It's supposed to be just about being in this beautiful island in this environment and really enjoying myself playing.

One For Polly was based on a Steve Kuhn track that was introduced to me by an American guitarist, Steve Kirby who I played with last year. A lovely guy. He's a professor at Berklee and he's a great guitarist. He asked me if I fancied playing 'The Saga of Harrison Crabfeathers' and I knew the title, because I've seen it in the Real Book years ago, but I've never played it. We played it through, and I remember just playing around with the chords and I almost immediately could hear how it could be done in a different way. It was the same for Espresso Martino which was based on a Pat Martino track called Cisco.

'Softly, as in a Morning Sunrise' is reference to the brilliant Emily Remler who is one of those sadly, many, female musicians that should be known by everyone but is often left out of conversations. What first drew you to her and why did you feel it was important to include her in this album?

In terms of the kind of classic jazz



guitarists, there are only two women that I know of, really. I mean there are a few more obscure women, but there was Mary Osborne, who was a great swing guitarist of the 40s and 50s and Emily Remler. I was over in New York with The Guest Stars in about 1984, and I saw this album in a record store, with a young woman - who I thought looked a bit like a librarian actually - on the cover. The guitar was a Gibson ES-330 and I was drawn to it. I picked up the cover, looked at it and thought, oooh, jazz! I bought the vinyl, brought it home, played it and I thought, wow, what a great player. Who is she? Who is this person? Nobody's heard of her in England. It was one of her first albums. I think it was Firefly, one of the first ones. So I bought all her albums after that. And I just thought she was fantastic. I think she was a couple of years younger than me, but we were part of that generation born in the 1950s.

I saw some interviews with her and I thought what a consummate jazz guitarist she is. She was up there with all the greats. She loved West Montgomery as I did, but I think she really suffered for being that woman guitarist who played as a guest guitarist in a lot of clubs. She didn't have her own band, as such. So all her albums are with different musicians and I think she had a lot of pressure because of that.

I was playing in The Guest Stars which was an all-women band at that time, and I think we really supported each other, because in the 80s, there was an awful lot of people who would come along and we got an awful lot of positive attention. But there was always that thing where you felt like you had to prove that you could play. Every time we went to a jazz club, we had to prove we could play, because we were a group of women. I think Emily got that a lot, and I think it really got to her. She just wanted



to be a musician, wanted to play, and be a great jazz guitarist, which she was. I think in the end, she died at the age of 32. She had addiction problems her whole life and I think that was partly because of those pressures.

I never met her very sadly. I played with Kathy Dyson a few years ago - she's a great jazz musician who lives up in the north of England - and she did meet Emily but I wish I could have been a bit of a supporter.

It's wonderful to have one of her tracks because that's going to raise awareness of her work.

Yes! I took her arrangement of 'Softly in the Morning Sunrise', and I played it in a slightly different key, but I used her arrangement, because I love all the

harmonics and the picking on it, it's lovely.

A big question, but knowing how much work you do raising awareness and supporting women in the music industry, your work with Blow The Fuse and so many inspirational projects, how do you feel, at the age of 70, being one of the few female guitarists? The world has changed so much since you first started and there weren't many women playing the guitar and not a huge amount now. You are in a unique position to reflect on this.

There's been some positives and some negatives... when I started playing the guitar, the only woman I saw playing was Suzie Quatro, on the television. My sister Bernice, who sadly died a long time ago played bass and she was a fantastic musician. Bernice and I just wanted to play

music. We were both very musical and we just played together and made up our own songs. We were into glam rock and it just started off like that. I realized that I could play lead guitar at the time and that was an important thing. All the other guitarists I knew were boys and there was a kind of pressure all the time, which could be a very negative thing and there was almost a kind of hostility towards you, even just walking on the stage with an electric guitar. It's as though you were intruding into an area which was theirs.

But then there was also tremendous support as well. Some boys would say 'I'll show you how to do this' and it could be really supportive. I think it impeded me, because in some ways, I felt at times that I'm the best girl playing the guitar. I would always be asked to do interviews as almost the only woman playing professionally in the UK. But there was part of me that liked the specialness of it.

But I do feel that if I had been a boy, I wouldn't have had that kind of attention. I also think I probably would have developed certain things in a better way. I don't think I was pushed enough, it was 'you're amazing for a girl', and it took me a few years to leave that behind. When I was in The Guest Stars, for example, we did a Middle Eastern tour where we went to Egypt and we played in the Egyptian opera house in Alexandria, and we had people (fans) screaming at us and it was fantastic, but rare. So, I think that it took me a while to get over all of that and I had to have real drive and resilience. I went to an all-girls convent school and I was the only girl in the entire school who could play a bar chord. I remember teaching the nuns chords so they could play hymns at the mass.

I wish there were pictures of that! A picture of you teaching some nuns guitar skills, that would be amazing.

Oh, so do I. I was the only girl in the school

who had an electric guitar, so I didn't have the groups at school and things that boys at the time of my age would have had. I'm very pleased I had my sister for a lot of that time. She went off to play with the Ivy Benson Band at the age of 16 and was doing an entirely different thing. It was very good that we supported each other when we were younger, and we had a real laugh playing. We'd also laugh at some of the comments we'd get and could share that - that was really nice. But it did affect me in some ways. When I got picked to do the BBC programme Rock School in 1983, I remember at the time, that was really unusual. People couldn't believe that there was a woman there presenting the guitar. But also the good thing about doing rock school was that it gave me a kind of status in the guitar community.

I'm almost scared to ask, but how is it now? Are you still walking into sound checks where people presume you are the singer?

A lot of times people know who I am now. With ARQ, Alison and I both get comments. Only last month, someone said, I've never seen a woman play a double bass before. So, yes, you do still get that as we tour around the country, but I sort of enjoy it when people don't know who you are or they vaguely heard of you and they're still thinking, mm, really? And then as soon as

you start playing, it's like, wow, oh, great!

But I sometimes think about how a 70-year-old woman is represented in the media and I'm walking on stage with my amplifiers and my guitars, and I sometimes feel like a magician. That's what it feels like to me. I'm a professional guitarist as well, and have been for a long time, so it's a little bit like, to be topical, for a moment, it'd be a bit like if England were playing in the World Cup, and I just walked on as the substitute and people go, what?! I've sometimes been places where people don't know who I am, and I pick up the guitar, and I just love that look on their face, they go...Wow! I love doing that. It feels like doing a little bit of magic.

You are an incredible role model for so many. I do hope you realise that.

Thank you, Fiona. I do have to just say, when Kathy Dyson and I - this is now going back at least 15 years - we got together to play as a duo for a couple of years. We had met as very young women in the early 80s and it was great. When we got together again, we said it's been 25 years since we met and at that time there have been no other professional women guitarists that have come up in the UK since then. We used to make a joke and say, we've been terrible role models. Things have changed since then, though. In the last 15/20 years, things have changed a lot, which is fantastic.

Words of wisdom or guidance you could share with female guitarists who are just starting out?

Well, if I was talking to my young self, I would say slow down and get your foundations in place. When you learn a song, really learn it properly. When I started off, I just wanted to play as fast as I could and so I don't think I got my building blocks in place. I'm a self-taught guitarist because

there wasn't the infrastructure when I was growing up. Now there is so much going on, but the danger for young guitarists is there is a massive amount of stuff on YouTube, courses you can go on, there's so much you can take in. It's incredibly diverse, and there's so much you can learn. But don't take on too many things. Just pick a song that you love, pick a solo that you love, and spend time really learning it, and really getting that inside yourself and knowing it at a deeper level. Don't flit from one thing to another because what happens is you learn a little thing and two weeks later you go back to that thing, and you can't remember anything you did. Let things settle and move through slowly.

If you told me when I was 15 or 16, that I was still going to be playing the guitar in 55 year's time, I wouldn't have been able to imagine the world, even at that age, and that many years ahead. You've got time, you've got a lot of time. Take it slowly. Build slowly.



[DEIRDRE links click here](#)

Interview by Fiona Ross

FLEUR STEVENSON

Photo by Steve Foster



IN CONVERSATION WITH FLEUR STEVENSON

BY KIM CYPHER

Earlier this year I had the absolute pleasure of visiting Crowmarsh Jazz Club to record the WIJM 'In Conversation With...' podcast with fabulous jazz vocalist, educator and all-round advocate and supporter of live music and the arts, Fleur Stevenson.

Fleur is one of the co-founders and directors of Crowmarsh Jazz and also the Wallingford Winter Blues and Jazz Festival, which since 2020 have been devoted to supporting musicians and the local community. This year's festival celebrated a staggering 54 gigs across 17 venues in 3 days with £22,000 going to the musicians and the venues enjoying a rise of over 800% in takings!

I was keen to get along to Crowmarsh Jazz Club to meet Fleur and all the team, to find out what goes on behind the scenes and what exactly is involved in these wonderful live events. I had the added bonus of taking in a fantastic performance of saxophonist Alex Clarke and her band of absolute jazz legends, as part of her latest 'Out of the Woods' album tour.

It was a wonderful evening, and I loved every minute chatting to Fleur about all kinds of things from jazz to chickens, wine, the benefit of musicians running jazz clubs for musicians, teamwork, family support, the ever-increasing role of the musician and much more. It was right up my street to be honest and such a breath of fresh air.

You can listen to the full podcast at the link below, but here's some highlights from our

conversation...

Kim – Thank you so much for allowing me to come to Crowmarsh Jazz this evening. Not only have you co-founded and co-direct this jazz club and a festival, you're also a jazz vocalist and you teach as well. Tell me more...

Fleur – “Oh gosh, well, life is busy! I teach at a lovely school in Oxford. I run a jazz singer's night once a month in Reading, which is a nice opportunity for budding jazz vocalists to come along and have a chance to sing with the jazz band, like a sort of jam session, but for vocalists, in a 'safe space'. I gig, I work a lot with some really lovely musicians, and we've just done our third Wallingford Winter Blues and Jazz Festival.”

Kim – The festival looked epic! What an incredible lineup of amazing musicians.

Fleur – “Yes, it was brilliant. We had 54 gigs over three days. That's crazy. 17 venues around our local town. It was amazing. A lot of hard work, but really worth it.”

Kim - That's fantastic! What I love about how this all evolved is that it's all about community, isn't it? It's all about your passion for the arts and providing opportunities for musicians. I love that. I read the story about how it all started back in December 2020 when you did a Christmas gig after the dreaded pandemic. You wanted to give the community something back. With your musical

Jazz Divas show Rebecca Poole
and Fleur Stevenson
Photo by Gareth Clark



colleague Maff Potts you created this fantastic festival.

Fleur – “Yeah, well, the pandemic was a really hard time for musicians, wasn't it? I think we were just told to ‘re-train’. So, I thought, I've got to put a gig on. I've got to do something for the community. So, I booked the hall and had to postpone it twice because we kept getting locked down. It ended up being in December, so we had a lovely Christmas concert. It was back when we had to sit everyone 2 metres apart. We had to have a one-way system through the building with hand sanitizers. We all had to wear masks and things like that. But it was a lovely gig and people turned up! I got my sisters to run the door and they didn't tell me, but they had bought elf costumes. I was trying to sing a serious ‘Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas’ and they're in the background ringing bells dressed as elves! It was brilliant fun. The festival co-founder

Maff Potts said we should really think about doing this again, giving musicians work because everyone's out of work and it's great for the community. We actually managed to get an Arts Council grant to kickstart it back in 2021 which was very helpful. We've had some really great names at our Jazz Club, we've had loads of lovely musicians: Liane Carroll, Nigel Price, lovely Alex Clarke tonight, which is going to be amazing, Claire Martin and Ian Shaw...”

Kim - You get some top names coming to Crowmarsh. Tell me a little bit about what you do behind the scenes when you're putting on a night like tonight.

Fleur – “Well, I guess it's not just the setting up on the day, but there's a fair bit of admin that goes in behind it...making posters and marketing it, doing the mailing list and just things like laminating posters and taking them round to the local villages



Photo by Gareth Clark

and putting them up. It all takes time. It's when my kids come in handy. They've been here today actually setting up the club. They've been testing the microphones. That's their favourite job!"

Kim - That's brilliant. All these extra jobs behind the scenes, they're like full-time jobs in themselves, aren't they? I mean, being a musician can be frustrating, I find, because all you want to really do is focus on your performance and everything, and yet there's so much else to do.

Fleur – “Yes, you've got to do it all. You've got to be an expert in marketing and all this. Everything.”

Kim - Do you think it seems to be worse now than ever? There seems to be so much to do when you're a musician?

Fleur – “Yeah, it's all the time, isn't it? I don't know, social media kind of makes

it easier in a way, but also... It's more complex now because there's so many different platforms and things.”

Kim - There is. You've got to have all your ducks in a row all the time. Not only are you trying to coordinate your own musical career, but you're also gigging, you've got a busy diary of performances, then you're trying to get posters done for the jazz club, sell tickets, coordinate all of that. You've got young children as well. How do you do it? What's your secret?

Fleur – “I don't know...Don't rest! Never stop! Well, I've got a really lovely team of people. I think if you surround yourself by really amazing people, like Maff who runs the club with me, he's amazing and photographer Steve Foster is a really great guy. He shows up at 3.00pm to get all the tables and chairs out.”

Kim - Yes, you do need a good team

behind you. And, actually, when I walked in tonight, I was expecting to see an empty village hall, but you'd all been in and I have to say the room looks amazing. The tables and chairs are all set out cabaret style with beautiful black tablecloths and little candles. Tell me about the band that's coming tonight.

Fleur – “Oh, it's going to be amazing! Alex Clarke, it's her second visit to Crowmarsh Jazz. We love Alex. And she has this incredible band. She's got Dave Newton with her. He's a legend. And talking of legends, Dave Green is on bass and Steve Brown as well on drums. Absolutely killer band.”

Kim – It's all very exciting! So, tell me how you first got into jazz?

Fleur – “Well, my brother's a drummer. And he always used to have band practice at my mum's house every Tuesday. One time the singer didn't turn up, and they asked if I wanted to have a go? I was like, okay, well, I sang in the church choir, and I did Lullaby of Birdland for Grade 1 so... I was terrified because I was used to singing in choirs. I just had a go, and I was like, wow, it's so freeing. I got hooked instantly and just started learning a load of jazz, going to lots of jams, then I started singing in bars. I went to see lovely Claire Martin for some lessons. And I just got into it that way and then just started gigging and I did my jazz diploma.”

Kim - Do you think a lot of it is about getting 'out there' on the scene and gigging? Because nothing's a better learning curve than actually getting up on stage in front of an audience and having to do it.

Fleur – “Yes, absolutely. And that's one of the reasons why I run the Jazz Singers Night in Reading once a month, because there isn't really anywhere for budding jazz singers of any ability. We have complete

novices who get lost in the song, but we help them, it's lovely. You can't really teach that, can you, stagecraft? You just have to go there and learn how to speak to an audience.”

Kim - It's experience, isn't it? You've got to get that under your belt. But you said earlier on, that it's nice because it's a 'safe space' and that's so important. It's really supportive for them to be able to try things out and it doesn't matter if they go wrong because you're all there to guide and help them back in a safe way. It's interesting because I think with music, you kind of serve an apprenticeship in a way, don't you? You work your way up the ranks.

Fleur – “I know exactly what you mean. You have to go through it to learn it. And, also working with top musicians, I remember the first time I worked with Gareth Williams, I was absolutely terrified. I was thinking, why on earth have I booked Gareth? What's he doing? Why does he want to play with me? But I got through it and what a buzz.”

Kim - Absolutely. It's interesting you talk about reaching out to musicians you admire, and you think, why do they want to work with me? But isn't it amazing how we're kind of a family unit together, aren't we, all of us fellow musicians?

Fleur – “Yeah, I think so. And very generous as well. You know, Art Themen's been really good to me. I have learnt a lot from Art.”

Kim - I can remember I learnt something that will stay with me forever from Denny Ilett who I know you work with. It was one of those moments when I felt I couldn't quite believe I was performing with Denny. I said that to him and he replied with something that will always stay with me. He said: “music isn't a competition.” I think that's so important because we can sometimes question if we are worthy? But it's not a competition, is it? Musicians bring

their own unique thing to the stage, and we all just work with that and create something together, don't we?

Fleur – “Absolutely. That's a lovely thing to say. It's so easy to compare yourself to other people as well. I have to actively tell myself not to do that because I am who I am and my voice is how it is and I sing the stuff I do.”

Kim – And that's what makes you amazing because, you are you. You are unique. Let's just move away from music for a minute, Fleur, because I think we've got some other things in common. And the two things that spring to mind are pets and wine!

Fleur – “I love wine. Wine and cheese. I also live in a bit of a madhouse with four children and a lot of pets. We have a golden retriever. We're about to get a second one because we're completely nuts. Five cats. Ten chickens. It's big and noisy!”

Kim - That's so lovely. Animals are like therapy, aren't they? I do find my two bunny rabbits keep me grounded. You know, after a gig, it could be early hours of the morning, I just go and have a little bit of time with my bunnies, and the world is all good. So, what with our love of pets and wine, we have a lot in common. You said you have a bottle of Prosecco in the fridge tonight. Shall we open it now?

Fleur – “Yes, let's go and pop it!”

Kim - While we've got a little bit of time backstage, tell me about your own gigs because you've played in some wonderful venues, haven't you?

Fleur – “Yes, I have. I've been very lucky to play in some lovely venues. The 606 Club is a favourite and Pizza Express Dean Street. I've been really fortunate to work with lots of great musicians. I work a lot with Pete Billington. We've been working together for

years. And I like collaborating with other musicians. I did a jazz diva show recently with lovely Rebecca Poole. I loved that. I'm also doing a Julie London show, celebrating what would have been her 100th birthday in September so I'm doing a celebration of Julie London. And then I'm doing a show which will be my next album, 20th Century Songbook, sort of jazzy songbooks. It's a work in progress but hopefully this winter I'll get on with it.”

Kim - So if you could do the gig of your lifetime, what would it be?

Fleur – “I don't have big dreams of stadiums and things like that. I love a small, intimate jazz club so I'm just really content doing what I'm doing to be honest.”

I really loved chatting (and drinking Prosecco) with Fleur. Her contentment in her work absolutely shines through, demonstrating an incredible commitment to music, fellow musicians and local community. Not only is she a wonderful vocalist who really captivates an audience, she is also devoted to her family and, together with a loyal team of colleagues including Maff Potts, Steve Foster and family members, she is keeping the intimate jazz club vibe and the magic of sharing live music well and truly alive.

Here's to the continued success of Crowmarsh Jazz and the Wallingford Winter Blues and Jazz Festival and here's to Fleur and all the team.

There was so much more Fleur and I chatted about in the full podcast, so do head on over to the WIJM website to take a listen.

In the meantime, you can keep up with all of Fleur's projects on her website and, if you would like to share the amazing community spirit and incredible musicianship at Crowmarsh Jazz or head

to the Wallingford Winter Blues and Jazz Festival (19th – 21st Feb 2027), you will be sure of a very warm welcome and a great lineup of musicians:

<https://fleurstevensonjazz.co.uk/>

<https://crowjazz.co.uk/>

<https://wallywinterbluesjazz.co.uk/>

Photos on right all by Steve Foster:

1. Alex Clarke
2. Liane Carroll
3. Lily Dior



RUTH FISHER

CHAMPION OF THE WAVES





Ruth on stage at Love Supreme



Thankfully, the world is not short of jazz champions. Jazz has been and continues to be an inspiring force across the world, and the jazz community is rich with advocates committed to ensuring jazz is an ever evolving and ever-growing genre. People rarely choose to commit their lives to jazz, it often just happens, much like the evolution of the genre, through inspiration, innovators and an undefinable feel.

Having worked in jazz for over 20 years, radio presenter, programmer and advocate Ruth Fisher is a true champion. Hosting a range of radio shows, Ruth has been working with Jazz FM since 2016 and currently hosts their weekly 'Future Jazz' show as well a monthly show 'Four Corners' on the new station One Jazz. She is also a much sought after curator and consultant, programming and advising on a range of festivals across the world including Watford Jazz Junction, Gibraltar World Music Festival and the Red Sea Jazz Festival.

Ruth's passion for jazz and advocating for new musicians is a vital part of the jazz eco system. Her wealth of experience through her vast portfolio gives her a unique insight into the jazz scene, and she is quite rightly a highly respected and inspirational voice.

Surrounded by music her whole life, her Great Uncle, Aneurin Thomas was a much celebrated big band leader, teacher and legendary fixture of the music community in Wales and her mother was a piano teacher.

We just always had music. It was mostly classical and I still remember one of the pieces that my mum played to me when I was born - Jacques Ibert 'The Little White Donkey'- so we've always had music in our house. My Dad liked music, but he liked the Sammy Davis Jr. and Frank Sinatra sort of thing. Or if he had classical on, then it had to be the big and bold, like the 1812 overture, something epic.

One of four girls, Ruth was one of the first pupils to attend the prestigious Purcell School of Music, Britain's oldest music school with an impressive alumnus including Jacob Collier, Robert Cohen, Anne Denholm-Blair and Sona Jobarteh.

I played the piano, but because we had to play two instruments, I also played the viola, which was a compromise for me, because I wanted to play the cello. But my parents said, we can't afford the cello, so the compromise is viola. Because it was a compromise, I've never really liked it and didn't want to play it. It's quite a difficult instrument. But I was very lucky. The school moved to Harrow on the Hill and it honestly was the best years of my life, because we had music every single day. We would start the day with sight singing, so the whole school would be sight singing. You would have somebody in the practice rooms practicing a Rachmaninoff piano concerto next door. We had two orchestras, we had choir practice on the Friday, everything was music. But also, the classes were very small, and when I was in state school, where you have 40 kids in the class, I sat at the back and didn't get really noticed, whereas here, I was in a classroom of 8 and I felt seen and heard.. It really was the most amazing school, I absolutely loved it and it just gave us a lovely background of music.

Ruth felt that she didn't have the dedication or desire to become a professional musician and had no motivation to practice for hours on end. She was, however, inspired by the many peers she was surrounded by at the time, including Nicholas Daniel OBE who is considered as one of the world's great oboists, and film composer Stephen Endelman.

That's partly where my love of classical music comes from, and that's helped me with my show on Magic Classical.

Ruth does not play piano (or viola) anymore and prefers to leave this to her highly accomplished husband Orphy Robinson MBE, the multi-award-winning and much loved musician. Orphy has over 100 recordings in his portfolio, with an astounding range of artists including The Jazz Warriors, Wadada Leo Smith, Sun Ra Arkestra & Mica Paris. He is also a fellow radio presenter on Delite Radio and One Jazz. A truly formidable partnership.

Jazz came calling for Ruth in her childhood, where the freedom, groove and more experimental side of jazz was appealing in comparison to some of the classical music she had been exposed to.

I remember my mum taking me to see Ella Fitzgerald and Lionel Hampton, at quite a young age, and just being absolutely blown away by it, and I just thought, you know, this is amazing. I just loved the jazz, it sort of spoke to me. Then I went into the Herbie Hancock era, Earth, Wind and Fire and the soul and funk side of things.

I like the harmonies with jazz. Classical music can be very rigid, and, for example, I'm not a huge fan of Mozart. I find him too twiddly, too sweet and nice, but then if you give me something like Bach, now he's got that jazz element, or even Stravinsky, suddenly going off in completely different directions. I find that exciting. I tend to get very bored when something is predictable and it's the unexpected that I really liked with jazz.

I mean, it took me a while. At home, Mum would be listening to more of the Lionel Hamptons, the Ella Fitzgeralds. She wouldn't be listening to say, Miles Davis. It was a little bit discordant for her. I do remember coming home one time to visit her and I played an Israeli band, who I thought were absolutely amazing, and it was not discordant by any stretch of the

imagination, and I was saying, mum, this is so good, and she said Ruth, I really hate this. I just thought, okay. She just didn't get it because I'd already moved on to the next sort of level of jazz, whereas she was still stuck in the 40s and the 50s.

After completing a bilingual secretarial course at Harrow College of Higher Education, Ruth moved overseas where her radio career really began. Living in Israel, she presented on the first all-English-speaking radio station called Radio West, in Jerusalem.

I started a Pirate Station, in the mid-90s, with some jazz funk. Then, coming back to the UK in 2003, I joined Soul 24x7, then Starpoint, and Solar, and Stomp. So, I was actually doing more of soul music. Solar Radio asked if I wanted to do a jazz show, and I just thought, you know what, let's do that! I started to get music sent to me and hearing all this new stuff coming out. It's just gone on from there. Then joining Jazz FM in 2016 with 'Full Circle'. There are so many young artists and new artists coming through that are not going to be heard during the day, so I thought why don't I give them some promotion and give them some airplay so that people are hearing them. It's just sort of developed from there.

Ruth's passion for supporting new music is significant and drives everything she does.

I've always really enjoyed hearing the new talent. I mean, you can't take away from the old - the Miles Davis, the Ella Fitzgeralds and the Charlie Parkers - or the Beethovens, or the Mozarts - and nor should you, right? But I want to hear something new and wonder where are we going next? I might not like it and I don't particularly like the pop music of today as I don't find it especially interesting. I feel that it's all done in the bedroom, almost, or studio, or it's all done on your phone, and I long for the days when they would go back and play

and look at some of the Vibraphone
instrument into the history



Ruth at WJJ

instruments...and you don't have auto-tune to correct your voice.

I went to the Dexter Wansel gig about a month or so ago, and they had a whole string section and to actually hear it and see it live, it was magical. It changed the whole ambience of the whole gig, because you had real instruments and real musicians.

The live, authentic element is a crucial part of Ruth's work, not just from a live performance angle but in creating radio shows too.

The way we do radio now is very different to how it was. Now we do everything online, and if I make a mistake, I delete it and do it again. So, it's all changed, but I do feel that some of the passion has been lost, and it's just noise a lot of the time, or it's a groove, but it's not a nice groove like an Earth, Wind and Fire groove.

Ruth knows what she likes and doesn't like, but wants to be surprised and taken on a new journey. Ruth doesn't like predictability, and this is reflected in all of her work from radio to festival programming. Inspired by the fresh and new music coming out of the community Ruth is always ready for the unforeseen.

I do like to hear something that's fresh and new. I'll give you an example. I was sent Emily Braden's album, who's a great vocalist, but when I looked at it, I thought, oh, God, she's done a Whitney Houston cover, and I thought, don't give me another cover, you know? And then I heard it, and I thought, oh, my God! She made it her own, which was really exciting. Jazzmeia Horn is another example. She can do all these standards, but she turns it into her own sound. I don't want to be able to sing along, because I know it, I want to find something that takes me onto a new path and I get

Ruth at Love Supreme with Mark Kavuma.



very excited by that. I like the unexpected because it excites me, and I feel it awakens something in my brain.

The challenges of the commercialisation of radio affect the community in many ways. Few artists understand the programming challenges behind the scenes and the battle to be heard. Many presenters want to support and play new music but are restricted unless there is clear evidence of proven audience numbers. Ruth fiercely finds a way through and always finds a way to platform the music she believes should be heard.

One of my shows was moved from Saturday night to Monday night and reduced to only an hour - with ads. It's a shame because I'm very limited. I've probably gone from about 18 pieces of music down to about 8 or 9. We just get told what we're doing, and if we don't like it, then we don't have to do it, and that's it. I can't play really way-out avant-garde stuff, even if I wanted to. Whereas I can do that on other stations

where there is more freedom, for example on One Jazz.

Ruth tirelessly uses her platforms to champion new music from across the world. From programming, consulting, hosting panels and as a guest speaker, Ruth has incredible access to the music industry and the rich music scene.

In Eilat, when Yossi Fine – the wonderful bassist, played with David Bowie and all sorts of people - when he took over the festival, he said one of the conditions of doing that was that there had to be a young person's stage, an up-and-coming stage, because he said that they are our future. 'These are your future musicians, and these are our future audience'. We need to hear who the future are, because you just can't stay in the past.

I also listen to new artists when I go to showcases overseas. I've been going to Fira B! in Mallorca since about 2018 and you get to hear the most incredible Spanish

artists, which is really exciting and they have some amazing, amazing musicians there. The same with going to the Montreux Jazz Festival residency last year, and to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv...you're hearing new artists. So, I'm hearing new music from different countries, because I don't just want to hear just from England or America. That's a given.

Ruth also has had the opportunity to interview an incredible lineup of artists and although she does not consider herself a journalist as such, she has shared an inspirational range of engaging and informative conversations from artists including Al Jarreau, Hiromi, Cecile McLorin Salvant, Theo Croker, Zara McFarlane and Gregory Porter, to name a small few.

I've so enjoyed it. I've enjoyed getting to know the musicians, and they're just fascinating people most of the time. I never go down the route of being very intellectual because I actually think they must get so bored being asked those sorts of questions. So, I ask if there was somebody you could have recorded with, who would it be? What do you do when you're not playing music? So, for example, Greg Murphy, he goes and plays ice hockey, and I'm going, why would you play ice hockey? Your hands?! You could have an accident. And Christian McBride, he's mad about sports. So, it's nice to sort of see another side to them. They're not just these amazing human beings that are so creative when you go and see them on stage and you're just so in awe of, they're human as well.

A place understandably very close to Ruth's heart is Israel and sharing the incredible artists and music from there has always been a passion, but now more than ever there are understandably, new challenges.

I'm Jewish and I lived there for 16 years and of course that's where I started my

radio career, on the pirate station. We were naive, we were youngsters, and the bosses said it was a station pending license. No, it wasn't, it was a pirate station, but we didn't know it at the time. I met Arnie Lawrence, who was a saxophonist from America, who'd set up the New School of Music in New York. He had moved to Israel and had set up the first jazz club in Ramallah and he was very much about bringing Israelis and Arabs together to play music, because music has no boundaries, no borders, and you can be on a stage with 10 different nationalities, none of you are speaking the same language. But you are speaking the same language with music, and I think that's really important and very powerful. I just fell in love with that scene. They very much live for the day and always want to try new things, and so I find their music very, very interesting. There is an Israeli sound and I can always tell. The minute there's a band playing, I can tell that it's Israeli. A lot of them go to New York to study there, so that they have the background, and then they might come back, like Eli Degibri or Yossi Fine and Avishai Cohen. Music is all around there. Anywhere you go, there is music. Everybody has the local radio station on, and on the buses, the driver has it on. They're a very musical nation.

Music is a beautiful conduit and musicians should not be penalized for the actions of a government. One of the reasons I play Israeli musicians is so that people realize that there is something more to it. I also work for the Israel Philharmonic, and I feel for them, because they're not responsible for the government. Don't bring it to the concert hall. Don't stop people from earning a living and just show some compassion. We're all human beings, we should all be showing empathy, and don't judge people by their governments. God knows, look at us!

One of Ruth's many inspirational qualities

love of the radio. In the age of streaming, more and more audiences are turning to radio for real human interaction and authenticity.

I'm passionate about the music and I think musicians are very underrated and underappreciated. That's also the beauty of radio and one of the reasons why I love doing it. It's such an important medium for the listener, but also for the artists that want to be heard. I love sharing music. I'll send it also to all the other presenters. We're constantly sharing music which is lovely, and I think it's really nice, you know, it's not exclusive just to us. During the pandemic, what did we do? We listened to the radio. We would have been completely lost without it. It is just a really great way of communicating with people.

I still get excited. There's still some really exciting music coming through, not just from the UK, but France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, all those places. They've got some exciting stuff and so I like to think that there's a good future. I think jazz is also becoming more and more popular with bands like Ezra Collective and Kokoroko. The young people see their peers doing this. A bit like, when Orphy was in the Jazz Warriors - Cleveland Watkiss and Steve Williamson, they were youngsters, you know, so they were seeing them, and so it's exciting and I think there's a great future for music in general.

All photos provided by Ruth Fisher

Text by Fiona Ross

[Ruth Fisher links click here](#)



Ruth at Bright Med Gibraltar



Photo by Elizabeth Leitzell

LAKECIA BENJAMIN

WE DREAM

BY ALICE HILL

Six-time Grammy-nominee and world-class alto saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin is known best for her intense, tenacious improvisation style. Her latest album, *We Dream*, sees the saxophonist in several other lights, demonstrating a kind of versatility that many musicians would not display in a lifetime. The album is fascinating not only in the ways it traverses multitudinous genres but also in the ways Benjamin weaves literature, activism, and philosophies into each track. As a big name in the jazz world, Benjamin features other jazz giants of the current day on specific tracks, blending each voice to create distinct, bespoke music. The array of influences, contributors, and concepts are brought together through a powerful and profound message of hope, or as Benjamin puts it, “finding light in the darkness”.

In interviews and on stage, Benjamin is candid about having struggled and faced difficulties in her life. Knowing this, *We Dream*’s focus on light, resilience, and hope feels all the more poignant. In just the track names, we see Benjamin encouraging us to go beyond the dawn, and, for the last two tracks of the album we are in the “Right Now” and then propelled into a futuristic “New World”. The closing track “New World” is particularly optimistic through its major harmonies and the sweet, singable melody above that almost verges on hymn-like corners. Benjamin is potentially at her freest in this album as she uses her voice as a rapper and poet to convey her philosophy of light.

The opening piece, “First Light”, involves spoken word by the saxophonist. Lines such as “out of the ashes I rise” resonate with poet Maya Angelou’s “Still I Rise”, while notions of “fire” and ashes have threads linking to the work of James Baldwin’s in *The Fire Next Time*. Benjamin’s work is consistently intertextual, with the theme of dreams linking to Dr Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous speech, and the track “Ascension” sharing its name with a John Coltrane work. Just six years ago, Benjamin released an album called *Pursuance* dedicated to John and Alice Coltrane. This, coupled with the significations of political activism particularly from the 1960s and 70s, situate this album in a wider contemporary movement of using the preformed connections between free jazz and the Civil Rights Movement as motivation for radical change via radical jazz today. Particularly in the saxophonist’s fiery solos with relentless runs, free jazz is called upon as something of a linguistic device, used to open up dialogues beyond the notes themselves.

Another theme of the album is motion. Centralised in the moments of spoken word, Benjamin says that motion is symbolic of sanity, survival, and hope. One of the saxophonist’s signature sounds is a high, fast trill. This motif comes up in many of her solos in different contexts, and is a textural tool to heighten the energy of a passage through rapid movement. Textures that involve trills or tremolos are also a standard feature of Alice Coltrane’s musical

landscape, as well as Benjamin's frequent invocation of the blues. There are always musical and textual threads connecting Benjamin to a wide nexus of creatives to be unwound upon listening and re-listening.

At the heart of *We Dream* is cohesive collaboration. Each artist featured on the album's tracks brings something new to the music. Trumpeter Terence Blanchard brings his extensive performance experience as a passionate and distinctive improviser along with his knowledge of film and atmospheric music to tracks like "First Light", and "Beyond the Dawn". Jazz heads Chris Potter, Jeff Tain Watts, and Sean Jones make "Dream Breaker" an energetic mixture of bebop and contemporary jazz flavours. Vocalist Tarriona Tank Ball creates a beautiful, misty, hazy RnB-hip hop sound in the title track "We Dream", making for a literally dream-like soundscape that showcases Benjamin in a gentler, floatier light. "Right Now" is steeped in the musics of the now, including electronic, hip hop-influenced brooding grooves and Benjamin's pedal-enriched saxophone above.

The "Jam" featuring pianist Hiromi is presumably a fully improvised, spontaneous excursion. Peppered with sounds of the blues and an intimate shared sense of time, the less than two minute-long "Jam" leaves me with the same feeling I had at the end of Benjamin's recent Ronnie Scott's gig: the saxophonist must have endless improvisatory ideas, it's as if she could play for 24 hours straight and still be inventing. "Mi Gente", meaning "my people", is a collaboration with trumpeter Chief Adjuah, but it is also a collaboration with Benjamin's audience, "her people". To note, the term "my people" is also likely aimed at Afro-diasporic communities, especially signified in its invocation of Afro-Brazilian music genres such as bossa nova and salsa. The unwavering energy and the slightly disjointed feeling of rhythmic displacement (the piano pattern sounds

like an upbeat, but isn't) make this one of the most thrilling tracks on the album, and seems to convey the power of collective movement.

Forever impossible to place into a neatly labelled box, Lakecia Benjamin dreams of the past, present and future of Black music in an album that transcends the imaginations of one's inner ear.

[Click here for Lakecia links](#)



Photo by Elizabeth Leitzell





INSIDE MARIA JOÃO'S SONIC EVOLUTION BY SHIREEN FISHER

When Maria João takes the stage, she doesn't just perform jazz; she reimagines it in real-time.

For decades, the Portuguese vocal icon has treated the human voice not merely as an instrument, but as an untamed force of nature - capable of shifting from a delicate whisper to a thunderous, avant-garde roar in a single breath. At this year's Cape Town International Jazz Festival, her presence was a masterclass in sonic fearlessness. As I would get to experience on the CTIJF Rosies stage on Saturday, 28 March 2026, João's performance style is famously physical, unpredictable and full of uncontainable energy. I was lucky enough to get some time with her before the festival to step inside the brilliant mind of an artist who continues to redefine the boundaries of vocal expression.

It turns out that her electric stage presence is something she has carried since childhood - originally channeled into martial arts and beachside adolescent theatre before it ever found its way into jazz.

"I think I was a very problematic kid, you know," she recalls during our conversation in a noisy hotel foyer. "I was very active and I had a deficit of attention. It was like that all the time. I'd start doing things, and then doing 100 things more. I still am like this, by the way! So, as a kid, my mother really put me in activities like aikido, like judo, karate, etc. I did aikido for 40 years. I only stopped because now I have problems in the knees, like we all do - you know, from

the falls, because aikido has falls, and so it ends up by hurting your knees, your back. I still do a little bit. So, I was always with people who gathered around fires on the beach. I live by the beach side, and you have these fires that they would build, and then you sing, and make theatre, and all these kinds of things that adolescents would do. It was here that I developed this curiosity for this kind of performing situation."

Becoming a musician was something that happened by pure chance for Maria, thanks to a guitarist neighbour. "I would always try to sing something and act out something. So one day, he says, 'Listen, you love doing all these things. Why don't you come to a school? There is a Hot Club de Portugal jazz school.' It was a club," she explains. "I think it may be the oldest jazz club in Europe. At the time, I was teaching swimming and practising aikido a lot. Then, the swimming pool closed for maintenance. So he said, 'Oh, okay, you want to take an examination and go there and sing this kind of music that you love?' I went, they let me in, and I was there for six months. This is how I became a singer. This is how I became madly in love with music. It was like being struck in the belly, like this is it. I'm gonna do this until I die."

Looking back at the Maria João Quintet albums like *Cem Caminhos* and *Conversa*, the most important lesson she learned about her own voice was when she left the audience captivated at the International

Photo by Alexandre Cabrita



Jazz Festival of Cascais, a moment that became the defining foundation of her career. It was a period marked by an intense, overwhelming romance with the art form, where the initial instinct to mimic the greats ultimately cracked open the door to her own distinct, unparalleled expressive language.

“In the beginning, I was so in love, I couldn't even think. I was just in love. I was a little shy. I would dress myself in black because I wanted to be mingled in the music. I would become the music. I think I did not even know what my voice was or what my way was. I just knew that I was there, sitting down and listening to all these incredible singers, like all the jazz singers. They would come with this album, and they would say, “Listen, this is Ella Fitzgerald, this is Sarah...’, and whatever, and then

they showed me Betty Carter, and I couldn't even breathe through all that adventure. I said, “This is what I want to do.”

“The two main ones were really Betty and Al Jarreau with the rhythms, you know. I was young, and I was listening to all of these and finding this out for the first time, because I never meant to be a singer or musician, so I did not know about these people. Then, I had to discover my voice, my way. This is very important, and I had this feeling once in Germany, I was singing there with a big bag full of my clothes and my stuff, and after me, Betty Carter would play. This happened like three or four times in my life to play before her. It was in Munich, where I played the concert before her, and then she came, and I was crying. I was sitting in the audience, and the other people from the audience were asking me, ‘Are you okay?’ And I was, because there

she was singing Everytime We Say Goodbye. This was what I would do at home, with my comb, banana, with a carrot or whatever. I would pretend to be singing these songs. I had the discovery that I couldn't be doing that, because that was her, that was her way, her language, her stories, her continent. I had to find my own way. It was in that concert where I was like, no, this makes no sense. Yeah, this is her thing. She's doing it marvelously together."

Following her early breakthroughs in Portugal, João's collaboration with Japanese pianist Aki Takase in the late 1980s became celebrated as one of the most innovative and daring duets of the era. Recording their live album Alice at the Ost-west Festival in Nuremberg showcased a seamless blending of intense avant-garde experimentation and emotional depth. Reflecting on how this crucial partnership first sparked across the shifting borders of Europe and went on to shape her famous willingness to experiment with "strange and natural" vocal structures, she notes that it all traced back to a serendipitous meeting in the former East Germany.

"It was everything you would see in films, crossing from West Berlin to East Berlin, there was everything that you cannot do, you cannot do this, you have to pay attention, you cannot travel with this, you cannot travel with that. Then they put your passport here, and then they take it until there, and then they search you everywhere. We were playing at a festival, which was my first one. Germany was the beginning for me as a singer, and then she was there as the main artist. I didn't see her because we arrived that day, but she was there, and she was the main, the main act of the festival, and she was a star. What I thought must be a star, you know, with a big short skirt with a big fur coat, faux fur coat, big red lips and very dark hair. She saw my concert the next day and she was enthusiastic - she liked it. One month later, her agent called

me in Portugal, saying she'd love to sing with me. I got my stuff and I went to Berlin. During the first concert, she totally ate me. She was playing. I would open my mouth and would think to myself that at the end of that concert, there were three concerts in the Quasimodo at Berlin, and at the end I said, this is not going to happen to me again, you just watch me tomorrow. The next day, we really started our partnership. It was something very exotic. I came from Portugal. She would come from Japan, and we were touring everywhere. She became an example to me and a really dear friend. The largest applause I ever got with her was at a jazz festival. This was a free jazz festival and we got a 20-minute standing ovation. People wanted us to do one encore, and they would not let us. Then he had Irene Schweizerafter us, and she was totally mad at us, and so we were like looking at each other."

Maria's artistic evolution reached its most definitive milestone in the early 1990s through her encounter with pianist Mário Laginha in the Portuguese group Cal Viva. Together, they forged a legendary, decades-long partnership that became the emotional backbone of her career, seamlessly transforming delicate musical structures into the singular "tones, words, and whispers" that defined her global recordings. When reflecting on the profound, foundational nature of his piano style and how their creative spirits first intertwined, she describes him not just as a collaborator, but as the central anchor of her musical life.

"He's the most important musician of my life, because we met, we were both young and we grew up musically together. He was already a musician - a very gifted piano player. We started a duo that then developed sometimes into trios, quartets, quintets or big band orchestras, but we were the core of it. Back then, we were a couple for eight years. And then it was too

much. You cannot go around the whole world and then with the guy, and then you go home and you live with the guy. So, we quit. We still keep this partnership, and we play sometimes, of course. We were playing so much that we were repeating ourselves and we had to part. He went someplace and I went someplace doing other stuff because it's also my firm conviction that all artists have the duty to reinvent themselves, to do something else, to flip flop back and forth, and start again and take all the risks. That's what I'm doing, because you can't repeat yourself, just you can't become just a business, it always works very well, and you repeat it, repeat it, repeat it. It was just not possible for me."

Maria's 1994 breakthrough album, *Danças*, marked a historic milestone, as her first release on the prestigious Verve label, capturing the immediate attention of the global jazz community. Critics unanimously noted that the music never lost its deeply rooted Portuguese sensibility. When asked how she manages to preserve that distinctive Portuguese soul while constantly crossing international borders, she explains that it is not a conscious effort, but rather an indelible part of her very being.

"I think it's stuck in your skin," she says. "Because what makes me Portuguese? What makes me Portuguese is the routine, it's what you speak, the language you speak, what you hear, the temperature, right, the weather, going to the beach. This is what makes me Portuguese and African, because my mother is from Mozambique. This is what makes me more Portuguese, because I lived there, and I worked there, and I grew up there, and Mozambique would come."

There is a 30-year bridge between the Maria João who set off to Maputo and India in 1997 to record *Cor* and the iconic vocalist who continues to look to Mozambique for inspiration today. The first was an artist

searching for color; the second is an artist who has become the canvas. Reflecting on those two distinct chapters of her life, João unpacks the deep, internal shift between the young explorer she used to be and the seasoned soul she brings to the stage today.

"I think I grew up a little bit - I hope that I'm always growing up. And I became more. I know more about Mozambique now than I knew before. When I came to play for that concert, I did not know so much. When I was a young kid, I had some abuse, by racist abuse at school. I didn't like it at all. So, I tried to look as white as I could, you know, stretching my hair with irons. I also remember traumatic things, like coming to Mozambique, and my mama wanted to bring me to South Africa, and she said, 'You're not going to the beach. I'm going to pull your hair. so that we don't have any problems. You can go to the beach after we go back to Mozambique, but now, no, let's go as white as possible.' So, how shall I say, this pride of being mixed, of me being both Portuguese and African, from Mozambique, was something I had to develop. It had to be developed with time, and it became a love you cannot imagine, and a pride. I feel so proud about this mix, but I was not feeling like that when I was a kid, because of what I was experiencing. Now all of that is part of your story, and it makes me imagine, imagine the privilege, no, I think it's a privilege. Now I think I know more about my roots there in Mozambique. The last recording I recorded with friends from Mozambique, and now I think I know a little bit more. But it's still the same. Firstly, I'm still the same woman, girl, in the middle of the world trying to figure it out, a place for me that is full of art, that is respectful and with grace."

As a trailblazer who has commanded the global jazz industry since the 1980s, reflecting on the most significant barriers faced as a woman, reveals a journey that was uniquely shielded by collaboration.

Photo by Simon Shiffman



When asked about her personal experience navigating the historical challenges of the industry, she notes that while she is deeply aware of the struggle, her own path was defined by a safe and supportive artistic partnership.

"I have some friends, and we talk about it, and it has been an issue, the difficulties of women in jazz. But maybe it was the time when I was always with Mario in the beginning, so I never experienced anything bad or difficult. Everybody was always so nice to me. Everybody, organisations were helping me, and I always felt pretty loved by the rest of my community. But I understand that others may experience differently, you know, but for me it was ok because I hope that it will never happen to me. Also, with age, I hope that it will never happen to me, not so far, but I can imagine. I hope not. I will be so mad."

For a globally recognised artist who has broken countless boundaries, the conversation naturally shifts to legacy. When asked if she feels a responsibility to mentor and guide the next generation of women in jazz, Maria João's face lights up. With Maria, stepping into the role of educator hasn't just been about passing the torch. It has been a profound journey of self-discovery. Reflecting on her nearly two decades in the classroom, she shares just how much she gives and receives from her students.

"I do classes at a university there, and I love doing it. First, finally, I can understand myself by teaching them, yes, by telling them how I do it. Now I can put a voice on what I do. You know, I can understand better. I love it. I've been three years in school, and then I've been 16 years in this university, and I love it.."

Offering her advice to young female artists fighting to find their own restless, creative voice in a market that constantly demands conformity, she bypasses gentle platitudes

and instead challenges them to approach the craft with a fierce, uncompromising tenacity.

"It has to be the love of your life," she states. "This was, as I would say, what music has to be. The love of your life - only surpassed by your children. The rest has to be the love of your life. You have to be a dog with a bone. You don't leave it because it's a very hard profession. It's very hard because you have to face your own adventure and the lack of it. Sometimes you have to face the adventure and the challenges of the music business, which can be really hard, and you have to be." Tracing the lines of her famous African-Brazilian connection, her work, alongside Láginha on Chorinho Feliz saw her exploring the African roots of South America alongside iconic figures like Gilberto Gil. Transitioning from exploring those African roots through the lens of South America to engaging with them directly through her maternal heritage of Mozambique, she views the geographical shift not as a departure, but as the completion of a deeply instinctual creative geometry: "For me, it's everything connected," she explains. "This is my love triangle, Portugal, Mozambique and Brazil. And then, with some of the powers of jazz, because for me jazz is adventure, liberty, and it has to do with the need of rich harmonies, beautiful melodies and meaningful lyrics,"

Since 2012, her boundary-pushing work with João Farinha and André Nascimento under the OGRE project has redefined her sonic palette, tracing a bold trajectory from early digital experimentation to the acclaimed *Songs for Shakespeare* in 2022. Charting the evolution of her relationship with electronic music over the last decade, she admits that while the technology itself remains beautifully mysterious to her, the magic lies in absolute trust and collaboration.



Photo by Alexandre Cabrita

"I'm in love with electronics, I have to say. I know nothing about it, but for that I have João. You know, we work together, and he knows a lot. It's another generation. I even tried that a little bit with Mário, but he knew we did not know how to do that. And now I'm really definitely in love with these electronic possibilities, all of which is rhythm."

Maria's latest creative chapter arrived in 2025 with *Abundância*- a title that directly translates to "abundance." Stepping into this new phase feels like a profound homecoming, explicitly bridging electronic avant-garde experimentation with the deep, traditional sounds of Maputo. Addressing why this precise moment was the right time to marry these two seemingly disparate

musical worlds, she notes that it was simply the organic, inevitable next step in a decade-long electronic evolution: "It just felt right. We already did four cities with the electronic thing, *Electrodomestic* was the very first one, which was not completely electronic. And then we did *Open Your Mouth*, which was with a German drummer, and then we did *Songs for Shakespeare*, which was a commission from a festival in Hungary to do music for the words of Shakespeare, and then we did *Abundância*. The album emphasises the communal power of voices, so what was the experience like recording with the TP50 Choir and blending their harmonies. It really fit. When we were there to record, we didn't have anything written because that would make no sense to have everything written

I'd say, 'What would you sing here? Let's sing together! And they would make the choirs and voices. It was unbelievable.'

Having always maintained that the future is the best place to look, Maria's musical philosophy relies on a delicate temporal choreography - balancing with one foot in the past, standing firmly in the present, and always looking ahead. So, where is her legendary creative restlessness pointing to next? She reveals that a surprising, genre-bending spark lit during a trip to Johannesburg.

"We were in Joburg, at Nando's. There was a band there recording some Amapiano and I started singing a little bit and they said 'Oh, don't you want to do a recording?' and so I recorded a little with them. I'm very curious about this, maybe we do a mix of Abundance with this kind of beat. My secret love is to sing with electronics and rhythm."



[Maria links click here](#)



Photo by Steen Rasmussen

LIS WESSBERG

BRINGING THE TROMBONE TO LIFE

BY FIONA ROSS

I get very excited when I see a female trombonist. Trombonists in general are still quite rare, but female trombonists used to be like unicorns. Historically, the mighty Melba Liston is arguably one of the only female trombonists given a platform, even though there were in fact quite a few trombonists busy working away without the deserved recognition. The International Sweethearts of Rhythm gifted us with Helen Jones Woods, Betty O'Hara, Jean Travis, there was also Velzoe Brown, Corinne and Lena Posey (and more), but sadly, most of these names are unfamiliar to most and they were not given the platforms they deserved. Thankfully, this does seem to be changing. The ever-evolving jazz scene is becoming increasingly full of glorious trombonists from across the world including Nabou, Natalie Cressman, Jennifer Wharton, Laura Impallomeni, Gunhild Carling, Rita Payés, Audrey Ochoa and of course Annie Whitehead and Angela Wellman – and this is only a small few.

Part of this exhilarating trombone scene and at the heart of Denmark's music scene is Lis Wessberg. Working in jazz and pop, she has played with an exquisite range of artists including Randy Brecker, Marilyn Mazur, Joyce Moreno, Kid Creole & The Coconuts, and with over 50 releases to her name, Lis Wessberg is a name we should all know.

Her debut album, as a lead artist, Yellow

Map (released in 2021) showcased her breathtaking compositional skills, combining the acoustic trombone with electronic inspired grooves. This was followed by Twain Walking (2024) where Lis continued to refine and define her sound, with a range of influences from Radiohead to Miles Davis and moving into English language songwriting. Her latest release In the Wake of Blue, sees Lis move into a song-driven approach to her compositions, in an album described as 'her most personal to date.'

I started developing writing lyrics on my second album because I felt it brought a totally new dimension - humility. I found it so beautiful playing live with a vocalist, singing my songs and so with this new album, I created five new tunes with lyrics. It was a big thing for me and why it's so personal, because I'm writing about my family, about being human. There's also a lot of nature and images of nature in my texts, almost like pictures of being human.

English is not my first language, but there are so many colours to my music, that writing lyrics, and hearing a young vocalist singing my songs, was very beautiful. The album is also about generations. I'm 58! I've been in this jazz thing for so many years and was a late bloomer because I've been making a lot of albums for other musicians. I made my first album when I was 52.

Lis's first album Yellow Map was specifically written as an instrumental album for piano, bass and drums, along with guest collaborator drummer/percussionist Marilyn Mazur. Lis enjoys the interpretive element of instrumental music where the audience engages in their own way.

It's free in another way, because there's no boundaries. You can let the audience think about it and feel the music. When you are writing lyrics and presenting what the lyrics are about, you're already tuning the people into the music. When we play instrumental music, it's also very beautiful, because people are making their own interpretation. So, for me, I think there's two beautiful ways to make music.

In the Wake of Blue has an underlying theme of nature, exploring the range of emotions we connect to when experiencing for example the sea, the clouds and birds. The visual element of this music is very important to Lis as a way to connect to the audience.

There are a lot of references to the images of nature, kind of like a picture of the inside. I'm trying to give the audience a kind of a frame, a freeness, because I'm talking about the skies, the plants, the earth, the soil and we are in the same kind of frame. That's my goal.

Danish is of course Lis's first language, but she has written lyrics for this album in English. There is always a balance to navigate when considering the commercial side of creating music, and artists often having to move into a space they are not necessarily familiar with.

It's very interesting. I talked to my label about making songs in Danish, but they had a plan for trying to share the music outside of my country. I was also working with an Estonian singer who doesn't speak Danish, so they said, you can, of course,

write in Danish, but we would really prefer it if you didn't, so you can work with this vocalist. So, I thought, okay, it's a challenge for me. But I think English is a much fuller language than Danish, and it has many colours to it. I think it is a balance, because you want to write lyrics that people can understand, so they know what the music is about. I think it would be a pity if people did not understand it. At the same time, it can be a very beautiful experience, listening to a language you don't understand, because you listen to the colour in the music.

Lis's choice of musician compliments and enhances her work beautifully. Having worked with Lis on her past three albums, her core team of Steen Rasmussen (Piano and Keys) Lennart Ginman (Double Bass) and Jeppe Gram (Drums) provide a beautifully subtle but essential foundation throughout, with palpable chemistry. For this album, Lis took a different approach.

I love writing music and I actually wrote this album on an island. I was there for a long time and had peace and time for writing music. I also decided that for the first time, we would tour the music before going to the studio. The other albums were made the other way around. And I think it was a very nice process. Some of the music is written sitting at a piano, and some sitting at the computer, working digitally, recording my trombone. I made demos so that it's very precise and what I want. I wrote 11 tunes and sent them to the musicians and then we started touring! We had about 4 gigs, and then we went to the studio, and the music had been developing because there's so much going on when you're playing live. I will do it the same way the next time, it was very nice.

Lis, continually growing, developing her inspiring compositional toolbox, brings a new element to her work: incorporating the depth and beauty of a stunning string

Photo by Steen Rasmussen



Photo by Steen Rasmussen



quartet. The whole album is beautifully cinematic with so many colours and layers. While the trombone is leading, it is leading as an equal with the stunning vocals from Veronika Rud. But Lis's passion and focus is always on playing live and the development of her music through the live experience.

I'm looking forward to playing it live, and you never know how it will be playing live. For me, when we release a tune, an album, the music will continually develop when we are playing it live. I'm very fond of my band and we have been playing together for many years. They know my kind of music, they contribute and I love how they respect my music. It's not finished when I release an album - it's like giving birth to children, they will develop and have their own life. They will grow, and some people ask me, can I play your tune? I said, yes, please borrow my tune. I love that because then it can become another flavour. I think it's a kind of a birth and I love that kind of growth.

I have a band, of course, but I also play my music with other kinds of projects. People are often asking me if I want to do something and can I bring some of my music? And I bring some music, and maybe it's a trio, maybe it's a duo, maybe it's a tentet, and my music gets another vibe. This is very beautiful.

With a significant list of live dates booked up until the end of 2027 and incredible reviews, audiences across the globe are connecting with Lis and her music – and the trombone!

This is very important – the music, sitting with an audience, it's a kind of communication. I give something to them; they give something to me. We're in it together and I always talk about it at my concerts, that this evening will be totally unique. We have to be aware of that. It's

very important for me that the audience can kind of feel me. Not only me, the band. My music is also quite slow, kind of poetic, but also wild.

I think the trombone, for me, is kind of what the cello is for the strings. It's a kind of voice and that's the way I use my horn. Trombone players, all instrumentalists, play in very different ways. But I don't play very fast on my horn. For me, it's like singing. This is why I think the trombone is the most beautiful instrument because it's a very simple instrument. It's been a part of me for so many years. I started playing trombone when I was 10, I think, and now I'm 58. It's many years.

I was influenced by many saxophone players and trumpet players - Miles, Coltrane, all those big heroes. But I was very attracted to trombone players playing more freely. When I went to the conservatory, I was playing a lot of bebop, and trying to be fast, and of course, you have to do it all, but for me, I liked listening to singers like Shirley Horn and kind of adapting that kind of voice to my instrument.

Melba came into my life rather late, but I have a picture of her in my studio. As the only woman of colour, and the only woman, and she's playing with a Big Band in Denmark, and I got this photo from a friend. I think it is so beautiful. Every time I play with my trio, I play a tune of hers. She's fantastic, and she was so well respected as an arranger, as well as a trombone player.

In The Wake of Blue is a stunning album and a truly inspiring artist. Do take some time to explore her incredible work, you will be all the better for it.

[Lis links click here](#)

FULL OF HEART & SOUL: MS. JC SOL BY PAULETTE JACKSON

Once in a while you run across an artist who exudes class and style. I have been fortunate to connect with such artists. Who am I writing about? None other than the phenomenal Ms. JC Sol! This Canadian-born vocalist is so soulful and passionate in the delivery of each song she sings, and I am here for it!

Ms. Sol has a passion for R&B and Blue Eyed Soul and the world is standing up and taking notice of this amazing lady!

JC's latest single is an interesting twist on the 1973 tune by singer Sylvia, "Pillow Talk" (February 2026). The instrumentation adds a little jazzy flair that Ms. Sol carries out beautifully! Her vocal delivery is right in line with the sultriness of the lyrics. I think everyone will be pleasantly surprised by this unique version. While we are on the subject of classics, also check out her rendition of the Burt Bacharach tune "Anyone Who Had a Heart" (Dionne Warwick 1964 and Luther Vandross 1986).

Her brand new single (May 13, 2026) "Show Me" is an upbeat, funky type groove that will have you up on your feet and clapping your hands to the beat. I urge you all to add it to your music collection.

JC Sol is a musical force to be reckoned with and a wonderful spirit to boot. I am a fan for sure and once you experience JC Sol in all her melodic splendor, you will be too! Personal note: I love the fact that Ms. Sol has so much passion for music and the

support she shows for other artists. She is a multi-faceted artist who I feel is going to set the world on fire!

For more information about JC Sol's music and upcoming events, visit her website: www.jcsolmusic.ca and follow her social media.

Now go and be your creative selves!

[JC SOL links click here](#)



Photo by Ellahrika



WHIRLWIND RECORDINGS

STEP FORWARD, REACH BACK

Whirlwind Recordings has been at the forefront of innovation since 2010. Founded by bassist, producer and composer Michael Janisch, the label is one of Europe's leading independent jazz labels. With a significant 250-plus catalog, including albums by Ingrid Jensen, Lakecia Benjamin, Alicia Olatuja, Cyrille Aimée, Marta Sanchez, Alice Zawadzki, Josephine Davies and Jason Rebello, Whirlwind Recordings have built an international reputation for championing adventurous, artist-led contemporary jazz. They have become known for their commitment to long-term artist development, helping launch and nurture careers through high quality recordings, international promotion and creative partnerships. Albums released by the label have received Grammy, Juno and MOBO recognition, alongside numerous other international award nominations and critical acclaim.

At its core, Whirlwind is deeply committed to increasing the visibility of women in jazz and creating meaningful opportunities for female artists to thrive on the international stage, and consistently support female bandleaders, composers and vocalists from across the UK, USA, Europe and beyond. Their support goes way beyond signing women onto their label. Step Forward Reach Back 3 is their Arts Council England-funded artist development programme, which supports outstanding female jazz artists through the creation, release and promotion of new music. The programme

combines album production, international publicity, mentoring from leading women in the industry, live performances, and long-term career development, with the aim of helping exceptional artists reach wider audiences and build sustainable careers. This is their third year of running this highly successful programme and we would like to focus on three of the distinctive voices from across the European jazz scene that Whirlwind selected.

[BRITTA VIRVES \(PIANO, ESTONIA/ SWEDEN\)](#)



Britta's album *Simple Things* introduces a pianist whose music blends Nordic lyricism with rhythmic energy and deeply personal storytelling. Performing with her long-standing trio and guest vocalist Genevieve

Artadi, the album reflects on family, nature and the search for an individual artistic voice.

Growing up on the island of Saaremaa in her native Estonia, Britta Virves was a keen piano student playing a strictly classical repertoire. A chance encounter introduced her to jazz: "I wanted to learn guitar. So I went to my teacher Tiit Paulus, and he told me to stay with piano, and introduced me to Keith Jarrett, Herbie Hancock, Bill Evans - my mind was blown - a new world opened up." Britta immersed herself in the music and her talent soon attracted attention. Moving to Sweden to further her studies, she was soon touring Europe with the acclaimed Norrbotten Big Band, under the direction of Joakim Milder, working closely with featured guest vocalist Genevieve Artadi and accompanying Artadi on a duo tour opening for Louis Cole. Now with her Whirlwind debut *Simple Things*, she presents the next chapter in the story. With her regular trio partners Jon Henriksson on bass and Jonas Bäckman on drums, and a captivating guest appearance from Artadi, she's created a set of sparkingly fresh original music that is at once accessible and outgoing, yet still deeply personal.

Drawing from her constant searching for her own unique sound, she filters her love of rhythm and groove through her Nordic sensibility to create an accessible, compelling blend of excitement and introspection.

Each tune on the album draws inspiration from an aspect of Britta's own life. *Simple Things* has the directness of a pop song married to the depth of jazz, as Genevieve Artadi's ethereal vocals float over an insistent backbeat that supports limpid depths of harmony. Two of the songs are dedicated to Britta's family - the tumbling triplets of 'Days of Lily' to her mother Liilia, and the pensive ballad 'Mirrors' to her sister Greta. 'Forever' is a musical tribute

to two of Britta's heroes, inspired by a groove that she heard Gregory Hutchinson play with Kurt Rosenwinkel. The gently insistent 'Road to Braemar' was written after a trio trip to Scotland, evoking the wide open spaces and the healing effect of immersion in nature, driven by Bäckman's subtly insistent drumming. "Jon and Jonas both have an incredible sense of dynamic - they're like an ocean, knowing when to chill and when to rush in." Showcasing the subtlety and dynamic control of the rhythm team, 'Bravery' is one of Britta's favorite tracks on the album - "I feel it's like a big waterfall that's rushing down and making its path just by flowing naturally." By contrast, 'Chances' plays with a neatly delivered set of accents that the trio toss effortlessly from one to another. Finally, both 'Stepping Out' and 'Days Of Lily' reunite Britta with her mentor Joakim Milder, who contributes the sweeping string arrangement played by Daniel Migdal, over which Britta's melody dances.

Simple Things is tied together by the open simplicity of expression that speaks directly to the listener, that finds its perfect expression in the effortless empathetic virtuosity of the trio. "The title *Simple Things* expresses my wonder over the seemingly easy and obvious maneuvers that hide a wide variety of complexity in them. Like looking into a microscope, when new things open up while you try to zoom in. I feel like I'm still searching for the direction my music wants to take, but this album is definitely getting closer to the sound I'm after."



NISHLA SMITH (VOICE, UK/AUSTRALIA)



Nishla's *It's Getting Late You'd Better Go Home* is an intimate collection of songs exploring belonging, identity and change. Combining jazz, folk influences and subtle electronics, it showcases her remarkable songwriting and expressive voice through music inspired by a pivotal period in her life.

Storytelling lies at the very heart of Nishla Smith's music making, and since the release of her critically lauded Whirlwind debut, *Friends with Monsters*, the evolving circumstances of her own life have provided the materials for the stories that lie at the heart of this new collection. *it's getting late, you'd better go home* was written during a period of emotional turmoil, as Nishla confronted a series of crossroads in her life, not least whether to stay in her adopted UK home or return to her native Australia. From these deeply personal concerns, the stories expand outwards to address universal themes of belonging and of absence, of closeness and separation, of yearning ambition and the simple joys of the quotidian. These extra resonances inspired Nishla to expand her sonic palette,

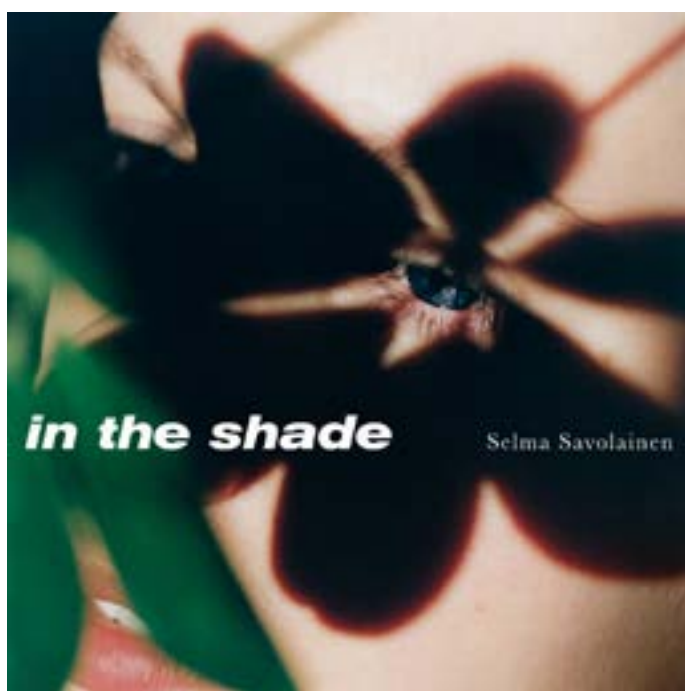
deepening the timbral possibilities with layers of vocals and subtle electronica, and surrounding herself with a hand-picked group of some of the UK's most empathetic and adventurous musicians. The songs are expanded and supported by Tom Harris' subtle, sensitive piano, embellished by the saxophones of Xhosa Cole and Harben Kay and the trumpets of Aaron Wood and Charlotte Keeffe and grounded by the superlative rhythm team of Misha Mullov-Abbado and drummers Sarah Heneghan & Kai Chareunsi. At the centre of everything is Nishla's remarkable voice, always poised and in control, but equally capable of revealing intimacy and powerful emotional charge.

Nishla's music is adventurous and deeply personal, "I wanted to frighten myself and I wanted the songs to expose that fear," but always prioritises melody and accessibility and an emotional directness that reaches out to the listener. 'jewel thief' addresses themes of time and change with a gospel-inflected poignant warmth, and ambient sound effects that pull us directly into Nishla's own life. On 'bluebird', Elly and Lucy Hanson's backing vocals add a paean to the beauty and fragility of youth, perfectly captured by Kay's flute. By contrast 'the beast' employs a vaudevillian bluesy swagger to deliver a mordant account of the critical inner voice, adding dramatic sound effects to pull us right into the story. Relief comes in the form of 'imagination' with its feather-light bossa beat and layers of vocals filling out a rich Bacharach-style harmony. For 'hold on to me' Nishla explores her love of 70s troubadours like Elton John and Billy Joel and reveals the full power of her voice to deliver the final climactic chorus. The insouciant shuffle backbeat of 'time' contrasts with the torch-song intensity of 'the lark' spiced with subtle dissonances from Harris' piano. "Tom and I have such a deep musical relationship, there's no one else's voice I could have imagined being

threaded through the music so intimately.” The ticking of clocks underscores the intense intimacy of ‘perfect’, and clocks also feature in the yearning ‘same stars’ which evokes the pain of separation, and builds into a gigantic chorus “I wanted it to sound like we were lifting off into space.” The sound effects, poised ambience and stunning vocals of ‘you and i’ place us with Nishla in a night-time garden under gentle rain, while the closing title track is a simple voice note recording of Nishla at her piano that feels like a direct message to the listener.

Working closely with producer Chris Hyson, Nishla has created an immersive sound world that showcases but never distracts from the strength of the compositions and the hypnotic charisma of her voice. There’s a real sense of place that unifies these tales of yearning and dislocation. “The spiritual location for the whole album is a saloon at three o’ clock in the morning, just me and the musicians and a handful of listeners.”

[SELMA SAVOLAINEN \(VOICE, FINLAND\)](#)



On *In The Shade*, Selma explores themes of identity, belonging and personal agency

through adventurous contemporary jazz. Her powerful compositions combine expressive vocals with influences that stretch beyond jazz into atmospheric and post-rock inspired sound worlds.

One of the challenges facing the contemporary artist is how to negotiate a balance between an outward facing engagement with the wider world and an inward-looking focus on a private inner realm. It’s exactly this tension that gives such energy and depth to *in the shade*, the stunning second album from Finnish singer/composer Selma Savolainen. “The title came from a day when I was trying to write in a sun-lit apartment in Paris. I felt like the sun was sort of like checking on me every day. Like are you doing the job? Are you busy? And I felt that I was taking part in a conversation between inside and outside.”

Selma’s powerful voice and her adventurous musicality are the driving forces behind a mesmerizing set of songs that are rooted in contemporary jazz but use a sound world that ranges far beyond, bringing in influences from the adventurous edges of post-rock and beyond. Selma’s lyrics explore powerful themes of identity, belonging and personal agency, with her clear-toned, expressive voice leading the way, ranging from intimate whisper to searing emotional outpouring. Each song is brought vividly to life by the extraordinary creativity of her band. Trumpeter Tomi Nikku and multi-reed specialist Max Zenger provide textural backing and melodic improvisation: Toomas Keski-Säntti deploys a range of different keyboards to expand the vocabulary: the bass and drum team of Eero Tikkanen and Okko Saastamoinen expertly control the dynamics. The sense of fellowship between the players - all long-time friends as well as bandmates - adds a feeling of playful spontaneity that lightens the mood even in the music’s darkest moments.

Each song deals with a very different situation, yet themes of identity and belonging thread through them all. 'Last Summer' uses a snarling, heavily distorted Wurlitzer and insistent groove to tell a story of responsibilities and missed opportunities that morphs unexpectedly into a heavy, Radiohead-style coda. 'Your Eyes' draws on the presence of a maternal figure, portrayed with eerie poise and calm reflection, building into a stunning trumpet solo from Tomi Nikku. "Tomi has such a wonderful clear sound, and he's just the sweetest guy, and him and Max have this deep, intuitive relationship when they play together."

The album's centerpiece is the epic 10-minute magnum opus of 'Lamb' that moves through a range of moods and textures to deliver Selma's heartfelt meditations contrasting the innocence of childhood, contrasted with the dangers of different forms of fanaticism. By contrast, 'Angry Man' uses a portentous, urgent groove to tell a story of the way public and private interactions spill over in the age of social media, opening out into a free-ranging keyboard solo from Toomas Keski-Säntti that recalls The Doors at their most compelling. Selma herself plays piano on the hushed, intense ballad 'House', spelling out further meditations on the mother-child relationship, that merges into the quirky 'Lie' with its entirely original mix of jazz inflections and Kate Bush inspired theatrics.

Finally, the title track 'In The Shade' moves at stately pace from the opening vocal and bass duet through intricate horn parts and some mesmerizing improvisations from all the participants.

'in the shade' is the work of an artist fearlessly moving forward, developing her own unique voice, unafraid to tackle serious themes and creating adventurous, ambitious musical settings in which to explore them. At the same time, the deep friendship and trust between all the players

comes across in the audible excitement and playfulness of the performances, creating an interplay of light and shade that captures the attention at every moment.

We are thrilled to be supporting Whirlwind Recordings and they are already planning the fourth edition of this incredible programme.

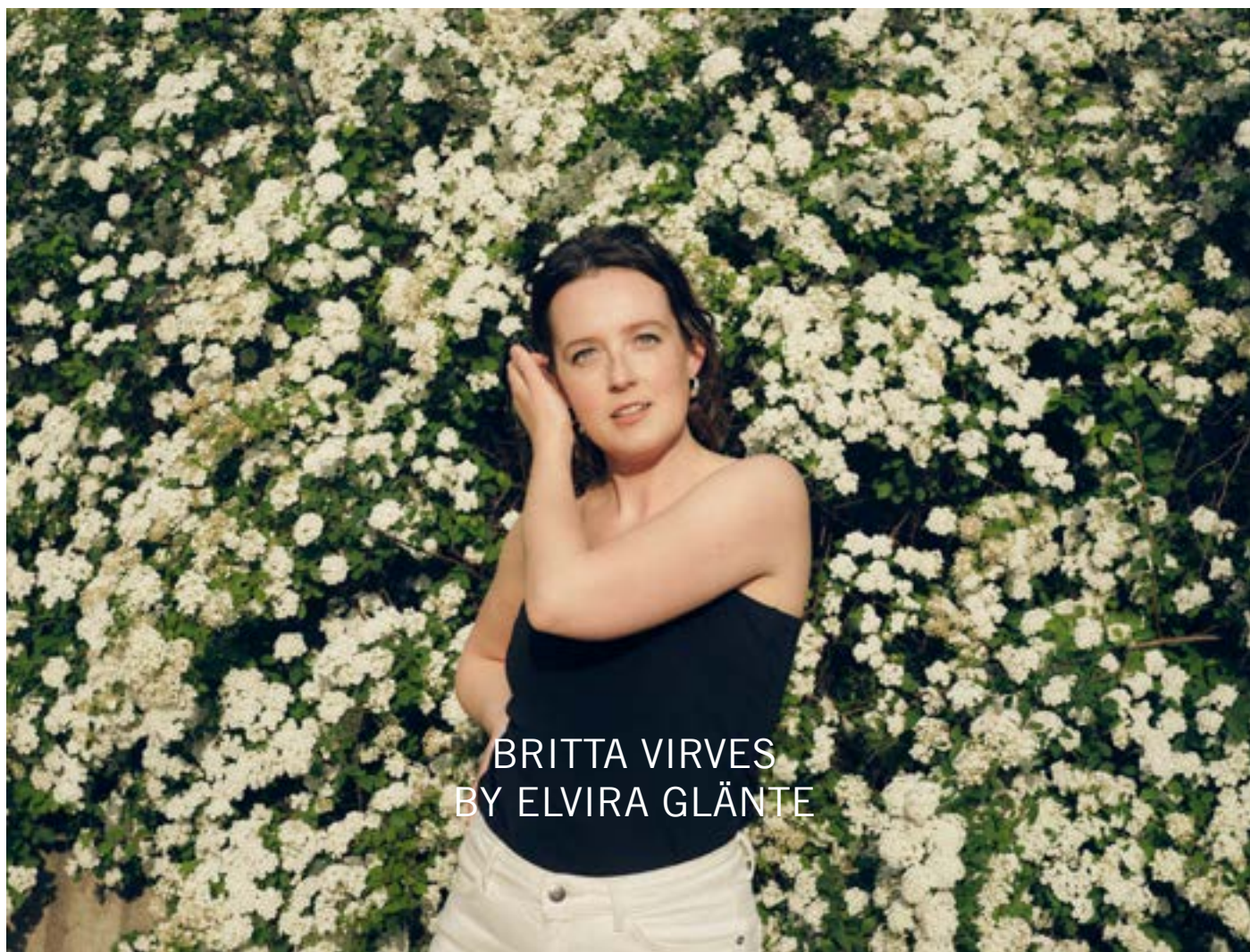
Stay tuned for more inspired artists!

[Whirlwind Recordings links here](#)



Nishla Smith by Craig Fleming

Artist and label text provided by Whirlwind Recordings



BRITTA VIRVES
BY ELVIRA GLÄNTE



Selma Savolainen by Severi Uusitalo

KIM CYPHER'S 'FUNKY LATIN JAZZ PARTY' TOUR

HITS THE GROUND RUNNING!

Fronted by UK saxophonist, vocalist and composer Kim Cypher, renowned for her dynamic, vivacious style and captivating stage presence, Kim Cypher's FUNKY LATIN JAZZ PARTY is the sequel to her hugely successful 2025 'LIVE and Smiling' tour which included sellout shows across the country including Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club.

This brand-new show has been going down an absolute storm since it launched at the prestigious Cheltenham Jazz Festival this year, where Kim closed the main DEYA Arena for the second consecutive year to a hugely enthusiastic audience, followed by a return sellout performance at Ronnie Scott's at the end of May.

Kim has carefully selected a lively, celebratory selection of music for this new tour including Latin, Jazz, African beats, Reggae, Ska and funky grooves, perfect for creating an uplifting, vibrant show, full of positive energy and feel-good vibes.

The band features top UK jazz musicians including Fayyaz Virji on trombone, Chris Cobbson on guitar, Alex Steele on piano, Rob Rickenberg on bass and Mike Cypher on drums who, between them have worked with some of the most highly respected artists and bands including Jools Holland, Ronnie Scott's Big Band, Courtney Pine, Curtis Stigers, Sheila Ferguson (the Three Degrees), Ray Gelato, Osibisa, Liane Carroll, Pee Wee Ellis, Maceo Parker, Fred Wesley, Monty Alexander, Spike Robinson, Van

Morrison, Paloma Faith...

"A Latin jazz party that exudes love and happiness"

Lance Liddle - Bebop Spoken Here

"Proof that jazz unites generations. We left Ronnie Scott's with our hearts full of rhythm, melody, and celebration"

Leighton Harris

"You were magnificent, Kim! Superb. Really enjoyed the show at Ronnie Scott's... such a memorable afternoon"

Chris Warburton - BBC Radio 5

"Wonderful gig! I heard people in the street commenting it was their BEST GIG this year!"

Monika S. Jakubowska - Official Ronnie Scott's photographer

"Thank you for bringing such joy to BBC4"

Anita Rani

"Even if you have seen Kim only once, you know the music and atmosphere is going to be something special. Constantly bridging that gap between performer and audience, the warmth Kim felt towards her current and soon to be fans was immediately clear. Could there have been a better way to end Cheltenham Jazz Festival 2026? I really don't think so"

Listen to Discover



“The irrepressible Kim
Cypher shows are jam
packed with positive
energy and a real joie de
vivre”

The Jazz Mann

ronnie scott's
JAZZ CLUB



Kim Cypher is a firm favourite on the UK jazz scene. With four highly acclaimed albums, award-winning music videos and performance in New York, Kim has firmly secured her reputation as a leading figure in contemporary jazz, described as a “rare musical treasure” by Jazz FM’s David Freeman and a “force of nature” by jazz reviewer the Jazz Mann.

[KIM CYPHER LINKS](#)
[CLICK HERE](#)

This is just the beginning for Kim Cypher’s ‘FUNKY LATIN JAZZ PARTY’ with lots of exciting tour dates booked for the remainder of this year and new dates being added for 2027, so do keep an eye out for a gig near you.

Photos by Monika S Jakubowska

Here’s a little taster from Cheltenham Jazz Festival:





Photo by Ben Glasgow

SCOTLAND SPARKLES WITH JAZZ FROM THE NETHERLANDS

The Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival is one of the largest jazz and blues festivals in Europe and consistently showcases an incredible array of talent from across the world. Founded in 1978, the diversity of the music programmed ensures that all audiences are catered for, from ragtime to bebop to contemporary jazz and everything in between, while also introducing new music and new artists to inspire and open minds.

Scottish musicians are of course, quite rightly, at the heart of the festival, and the organisers are committed to not only supporting established Scottish musicians but developing and supporting the new and emerging talent that is so beautifully rich in Scotland. This year's lineup gave us inspiring Scottish stars including Marianne MacGregor, Seonaid Aitken and of course, Fergus McCreadie.

For 2026, we are also presented with a very special partnership with the incredible SPARK: Jazz From The Netherlands. Funded by the Performing Arts Fund NL and the Scottish Government's EXPO Fund, and delivered in partnership with injazz / Buma Cultuur and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the United Kingdom, SPARK was a very welcome addition to this year's festival.

A relatively new initiative, SPARK introduces both emerging and internationally acclaimed artists to Scotland and is growing from strength

to strength. Beginning in 2022 with a partnership with Italy, followed by Norway, Czechia, Luxembourg and now this year, the Netherlands, with a truly inspiring lineup including pianist, composer and educator, Harmen Fraanje, who has built a highly respected reputation for his contemporary jazz work especially with ECM, Dutch Jazz legend, guitarist Jesse van Ruller, partnering with rising star Maarten Hogenhuis, and award winning trumpeter Peter Somuah who is known for his cross-genre compositions with flavours of traditional Ghanaian music, funk, jazz and electronica.

I was thrilled to be invited to meet two of the female artists performing at this year's festival - Femke Mooren and Yanna Pelser - and experience the incredible jazz from the Netherlands.

Saxophonist Femke Mooren won the Princess Christina Jazz Competition in 2023, followed by the Women in Jazz Prize, and has been taking full advantage of the opportunities that have been presented to her. Femke received funding to release her first album Mora, in March of this year which included seven of her own compositions. With some incredible reviews already - 'an extraordinarily poetic solo, in which she surpasses quite a few fellow saxophonists', 'an extremely strong debut from a bandleader and saxophonist who will certainly surprise us musically many times in the near future!' - the future is looking so very exciting for this incredible saxophonist.

Photo by Ben Glasgow



In a unique collaboration for the festival, SPARK teamed Femke with Scottish musicians Ali Watson (bass), Simon Herberholz (tenor saxophone) and Greg Irons (drums). Watching their performance, you would have never known they had only just met. The communication and chemistry was very exciting. This is one of the many wonderful elements to the SPARK programme, forging new relationships and opportunities while supporting the development of musicians.

To be honest, I was a little nervous beforehand. Not only working with new musicians but it was also a new formation for me. Normally I play with a piano or guitar, some harmony, so this was a completely new concept for me. How does that work? How do I still find my sound? Are the people nice and could we fit well together? I met with Ali for a drink and chat beforehand and immediately felt more relaxed and I left feeling comfortable and calm- and ready.

It was Femke's first time in Scotland and she took full advantage of the quick trip, exploring Edinburgh. *'For me it was really nice because I love walking around by myself and there's a castle and hills and everything looked like a fairy tale. When I went for a coffee, all the people that I met were up for a chat and it felt really nice in the city.'*

Musicians are carefully selected to take part in the project, taking into account musical styles and approaches and Femke was thrilled to be selected. 'This was the first time Spark have worked with the Netherlands. I went to the conference and they were talking to a lot of Dutch artists and I hope to do more with them. I would also love to stay in touch with the Scottish musicians and Gerard (Gerard Mehigan, Arts Management at Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival) because also the nice thing about this is you make connections and meet people. This really helps with my career'

Photo by Ben Glasgow



Look out for the full interview with Femke coming out soon on our Jazz in Europe column.

The Netherlands has garnered a reputation for artist innovation and the development of new music, and has a significant experimental scene. Dutch trio Ponga with Yanna Pelser (viola/ vocals) Remco Menting (drums/percussion) and Timon Koomen (guitar) brought something very special to The Jazz Bar as part of the festival. The experimental and free jazz scene in Edinburgh is small but mighty, and if the audience's reception to Ponga is anything to go by, it is ready to explode.

Ponga use their theatrical shared background to create unexpected soundscapes crossing a range of genres from rock, jazz and classical music, continually moving between harmonic,

melodic and percussive spaces. Their performance was truly electrifying.

A really exciting artist, classically trained violist and composer Yanna Pelser already has a significant portfolio, including working with North Sea String Quartet, Tyn Wybenga's Brainteaser Orchestra and Ambrose Akinmusire. With a range of projects on the go, it was fascinating to talk to Yanna about the spaces she works in.

I consider myself a hybrid artist. I join in with my voice playing viola together in certain contexts and have some singer/ songwriter projects, but I also have a project which is more towards contemporary classical idiom mixed with folk influences. I would say I'm like the water that flows in between everything. But the word hybrid kind of covers it - taking things from everywhere. I follow my curiosity.

Ponga work in the experimental field and Yanna explained that they decide on the shape of the set just before they perform. It could be completely improvised, or a few tunes as a starting point. Engaging with the audience is a key element to the performance and I was fascinated to hear about a guest book.

Sometimes if the space allows it, we start by walking around playing tubes that when you swirl them, make sounds, trying to involve the audience already. We also usually have a guest book with us and during the show we ask the audience to write a message to the next audience. Then we read the messages out to the next audience and it's so nice and feels like we are connecting audiences.

It was really incredible. Starting at the back of the venue Ponga opened their gig swinging melodic tubes, working their way through the audience to the stage. People were captivated and that feeling stayed with them throughout the gig. Although mostly improvised, there was an incredible tightness to their performance, but coming from shared emotions, rather than any specifically planned timing. It was quite wonderful to watch and feel and their chemistry was palpable.

Look out for the full interview with Yanna coming out soon on our Jazz in Europe column.

The Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival and Spark must be congratulated and celebrated for the inspiring work they are doing. Sharing music from across the world and giving artists so many much needed opportunities, is significant. Anyone fortunate enough to experience the live performances this year, will have left feeling uplifted and exhilarated.

More of this please!



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.



**VANGUARD
VOICES**

**THE NEW
PODCAST FROM
THE AWARD
WINNING J STEPS**

WJM

PHOTO BY MONIKA S JAKUBOWSKA



THE WOMEN IN JAZZ MEDIA PODCAST SERIES



IN CONVERSATION WITH...

STICKS AND THRONES

ON THE BOOKCASE

KICKING DOWN THE DOOR

VANGUARD VOICES



ON THE BOOKCASE

The Women In Jazz Media bookcase is all about platforming female authors from across the world. With over 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:

Maggie Doyle
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



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ON THE BOOKCASE

PLATFORMING
FEMALE AUTHORS
ACROSS THE WORLD

WITH
SPECIAL
GUEST

MAGGIE
DOYLE

WJM



Photo by Rebecca McConnell





A woman with long, curly red hair is playing a Fender bass guitar on stage. She is wearing a blue sequined top. The background is dark with purple and blue stage lights. The title "ON THE Women in Jazz Media PLAYLIST" is overlaid in a gold, serif font.

ON THE Women in Jazz Media PLAYLIST

NIK WEST by Monika S Jakubowska

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 life-time contributions to the jazz music and jazz radio community.

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

CLICK ON THE ALBUM COVERS TO
PURCHASE AND SUPPORT EACH
ARTIST!





Photo courtesy of Jazz Connect



Photo by MONIKA S JAKUBOWSKA



HELEN SUNG

Helen Sung Big Band
“Oracles”
Sunnyside Communications

Up until now, pianist Helen Sung has been associated with smaller groups in her discography: trios, quartets, smaller ensembles. With her new recording “Oracles”, Helen ventures into the Big Band realm, and the result is a stunning aural experience. Of the 12 tracks on the album, all but 4 are her own compositions. Her band is in top notch form, including highly recognizable names on saxophone: John Ellis, Dave Pietro and Nicole Glover. Her rhythm section of Vicente Archer, Adam Cruz and Samuel Torres are as good as they come. Welcome, Helen, to the contemporary big band community!



HANNAH HORTON

Hannah Horton

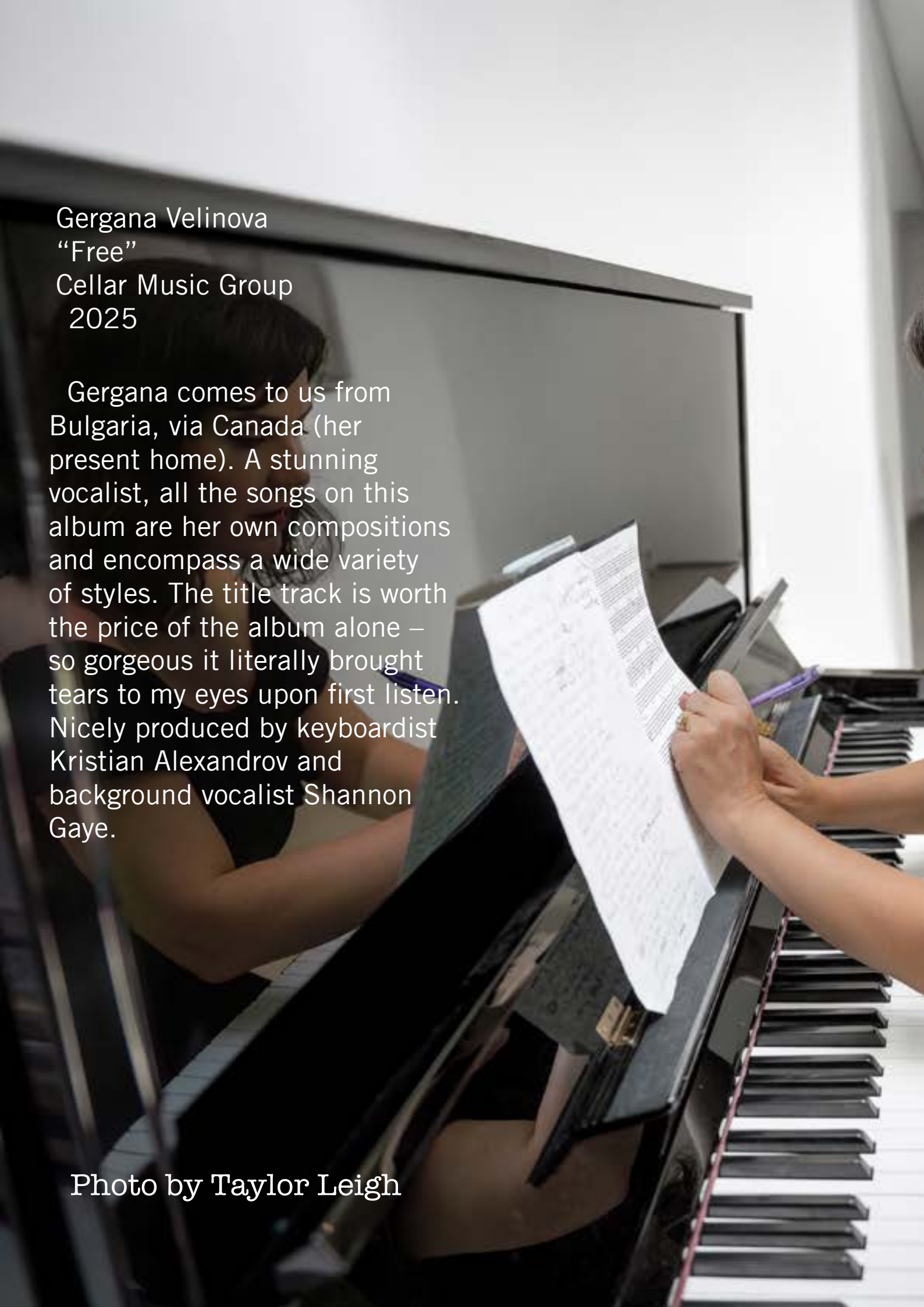
Stories on the Wind



Hannah Horton
“Stories on the Wind”
Swinging Cat Records

I recently became acquainted with saxophonist Hannah Horton from the UK and got to meet her in person at the jazzahead! convention in Bremen, Germany. She handed me a copy of her new album (just recently released) at that time, so I’ve had a chance to digest it and use it on my radio program. In addition to being a fine sax player with a beautiful tone, all the compositions on this album are her own. She writes compelling, memorable melodies. She leads a quartet of fine players, and the album is beautifully engineered by Martin Levan. I’m particularly fond of the pieces where she plays baritone saxophone!

Photo by TATIANA GORILOVSKY

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a black sleeveless top, sitting at a black grand piano. She is looking down at a sheet of music held by a stand. Her hands are on the keys. The piano is in a room with a white wall and a window in the background. The lighting is soft and natural.

Gergana Velinova
“Free”
Cellar Music Group
2025

Gergana comes to us from Bulgaria, via Canada (her present home). A stunning vocalist, all the songs on this album are her own compositions and encompass a wide variety of styles. The title track is worth the price of the album alone – so gorgeous it literally brought tears to my eyes upon first listen. Nicely produced by keyboardist Kristian Alexandrov and background vocalist Shannon Gaye.

Photo by Taylor Leigh



GERGANA VELINOVA

CELLAR 25



GERGANA
VELINOVA

SHUTEEN ERDENEBAATAR

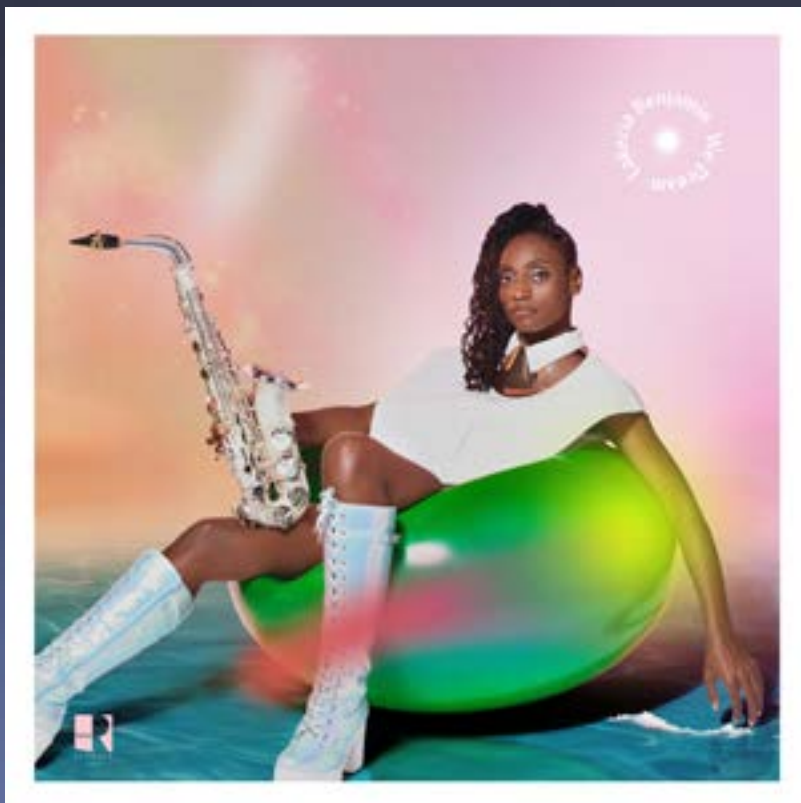


Photo by Uli Neumann-Cosel



Shuteen Erdenebaatar & Nils Kugelmann
“Under the Same Stars”
Motéma Music

I remember well the release “Rising Sun”, also on Motéma Music, by pianist Shuteen Erdenebaatar and her quartet. Memorable not just because she originally hails from Mongolia (jazz is truly the world’s music now!) but because of her both highly technical and melodic approach to the piano. Shuteen studied classical piano and composition at the Mongolian University of Culture and Arts, before moving to Munich, Germany. On this recording, she partners with Nils Kugelmann, who nicely complements her on clarinet and double bass. His use of the contra-alto clarinet is a nice sonic choice for their duets. A very beautiful album – put this on late night with a nice glass of wine or cup of tea! Dim the lights!!



Lakecia Benjamin “We Dream” Artwork Records

Maestra Lakecia Benjamin has risen relatively quickly in her young life to be recognized as one of the world’s top alto saxophone players. Her new side “We Dream” is a further example of that stature. One of the things that I really admire is when a player has such self-confidence as to invite another player (on the same instrument) onto a recording. Here we have evidence of that with her inclusion of the great Chris Potter on tenor. Other luminaries on this new one include Sean Jones, Terence Blanchard and Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah (on trumpets), Jeff ‘Tain’ Watts (drums), and Hiromi (keys). This record has a wonderful contemporary feeling, with close ties to the traditions she comes from.



LAKECIA BENJAMIN



Photo by Elizabeth Leitzell

LEIGH PILZER



Leigh Pilzer
“Keep Holding On”
Strange Woman Records

Dr. Leigh Pilzer is a baritone saxophonist, composer, educator and band leader from the Washington, D.C. area in the United States. Her new album, “Keep Holding On”, is primarily a bari sax/organ/drums trio album. The sonic quality of the baritone sax with Paul Bratcher’s Hammond B3 and Greg Holloway’s drums just works so well! All the compositions on the album are hers, except for one each from the other two band members. A few tracks feature guest appearances from trumpeters or trombonists. The track “What’s Up, Puppy” wins my heart, as it is a nod to the late, great Dr. David Baker, Prof. of Music at Indiana University (my alma mater)!

ER



LEIGH PILZER

WITH
PAUL BRATCHER, B3 ORGAN
GREG HOLLOWAY, DRUMS

KEEP HOLDING ON



Photo by Suzette Niess

EMIE R ROUSSEL





Emie R. Roussel Trio
“Terr”
UNI musiqc

Out of Quebec, Canada comes this inventive trio, led by pianist and keyboardist Emie Rioux-Roussel. All the tracks are Emie’s compositions – some are straight-ahead jazz piano trio numbers; others are electric jazz fusion in nature. Given that I love both formats, this album really resonated with me! Her prodigious keyboard work can be heard on “John rêve en noir et blanc”, where she takes an amazing synth solo. Nicolas Bédard is on electric bass, and Dominic Cloutier is behind the drum kit. The trio play together with the facility and sympatico of a group that has played together for an extensive time. In looking at their website, I see that they’ve recorded 5 albums prior to “Terr” – I need to get these!

Photo by JACEK BRUN

SHARON MINEMOTO





Sharon Minemoto 'Goodbye, Strawberry Hill' Cellar Music Group

Ms. Minemoto-san is a resident of Vancouver, Canada. She is a pianist, composer and educator in British Columbia. This album is based around the horrific internment of Canadians of Japanese ancestry at the beginning of World War II. I knew that this happened in the United States where I grew up and live – but I did not know that this also happened in Canada. Kudos to label head Cory Weeds for putting out this album of important historical significance. Now – about the music!

Sharon is a gifted composer. The music is written for and performed by a quartet, including Jon Bentley on tenor saxophone, Darren Radtke on bass and Bernie Arai - drums and hotchiku. The album is superbly recorded by Dave Sikula and mixed and mastered by Chris Gestrin – it often sounds 'bigger' than 'just' a quartet!

Photo by Robyn Ardagh



EVE CORNELIOUS

Photo by Pavel Korbut



Eve Cornelious
“Again...Naturally”
TonEveJa Records

The new album from veteran jazz vocalist Eve Cornelious once again features her powerful vocal abilities. Her band includes piano, bass, drums, percussion, trombone, saxophone and trumpet – but her voice is always front and center. The repertoire includes compositions by songwriters as diverse as Dinah Washington, Leonard Bernstein, George Harrison, Sérgio Mendes and Harold Arlen! A must for fans of the classic crooners.

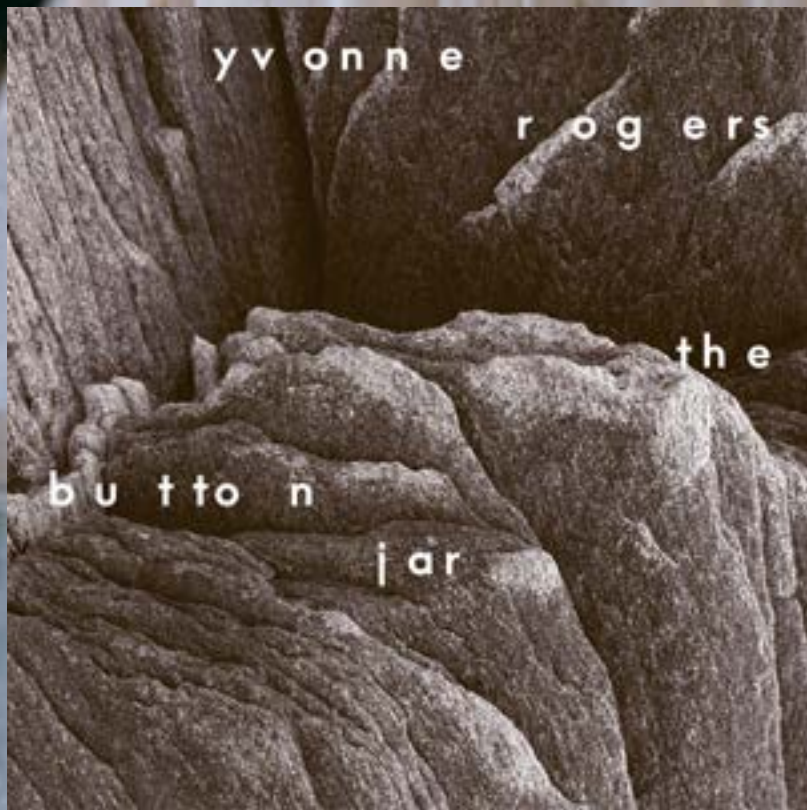
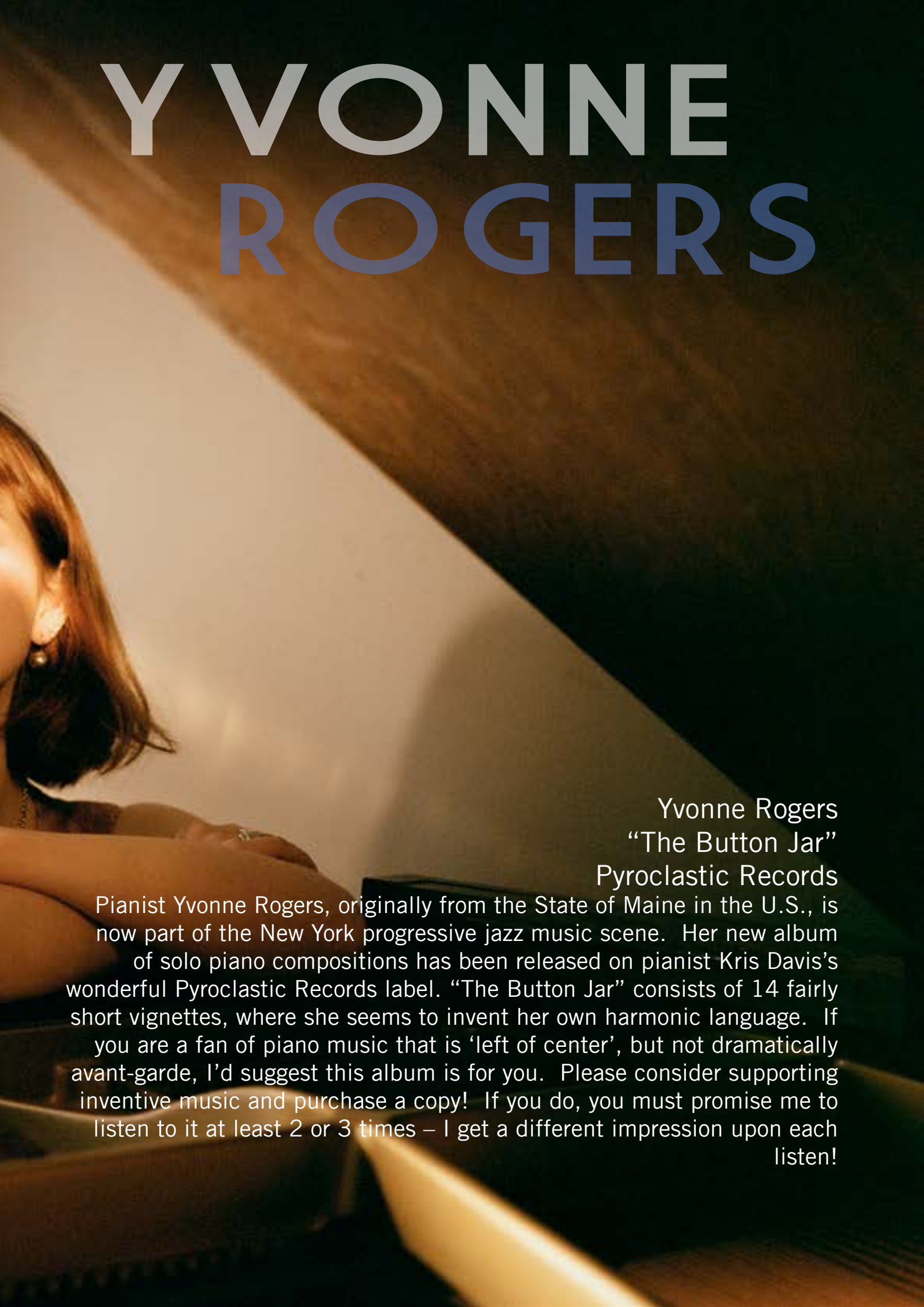


Photo by Alice Plati



YVONNE ROGERS

Yvonne Rogers
“The Button Jar”
Pyroclastic Records

Pianist Yvonne Rogers, originally from the State of Maine in the U.S., is now part of the New York progressive jazz music scene. Her new album of solo piano compositions has been released on pianist Kris Davis’s wonderful Pyroclastic Records label. “The Button Jar” consists of 14 fairly short vignettes, where she seems to invent her own harmonic language. If you are a fan of piano music that is ‘left of center’, but not dramatically avant-garde, I’d suggest this album is for you. Please consider supporting inventive music and purchase a copy! If you do, you must promise me to listen to it at least 2 or 3 times – I get a different impression upon each listen!

Audrey Ochoa
“The Sorceress”
Chronograph Records

Canadian trombonist Audrey Ochoa is at it again! Her new album “The Sorceress” is another example of why I think she is one of the most interesting trombonists on the scene today. Consisting of 14 new compositions all by Ms. Ochoa, her approach is modern, highly melodic, and harmonically interesting – yet she simultaneously sounds well-grounded in her studies of past trombone masters. She possesses great facility on the ‘bone’ with her inventive solos. The band nicely pulls off her compositions – and the album, entirely engineered by Brad Smith, sounds awesome!



Photo by Uryelle Lopez



AUDREY OCHOA



SYLVIA BROOKS



Photo by Antoine Reekmans



Sylvia Brooks
“Soliloquy”
SBM

The newest album by vocalist Sylvia Brooks is simply a gorgeous production. The song selection is a nice mix of compositions by others (e.g. Mal Waldron, Sting, Tom Waits) and originals by her together with her pianist and collaborator Christian Jacob. Christian nicely supports Sylvia’s vocals – he’s a pianist who is used to working with vocalists. Sylvia’s voice is beautiful and pitch perfect. One standout track is the original “A Letter to Sophie”, which debuted at the January 2026 Jazz Congress in New York, and received an enthusiastic response from the jazz radio programming community. In my opinion, this is her best album yet!



VIRGINIA MACDONALD

Virginia MacDonald
“in search of...”
Cellar Music Group

Another Canadian artist on my playlist for this issue is Virginia MacDonald. She has devoted her career to exclusively the jazz clarinet, rather than going the saxophone route. She has appeared on albums in collaboration with trombonist/saxophonist Michael Dease, but this is her debut album as a leader. She began playing the clarinet at a very early age, so even at her relatively young age now she possesses great mastery of what is often perceived as a difficult instrument to control. She is also a significant composer and most of the pieces on this album are her own compositions. They are expertly performed by a first call band: Geoff Keezer (piano), Curtis Nowosad (drums), Ira Coleman (bass) and vocalese nicely provided on a couple of tracks by Laura Anglade. Expertly recorded at Michael Brorby's Brooklyn based Acoustic Recording studio. A must for any lover of jazz clarinet!



Selfie photo by Virginia



Mohini Dey by Monika S Jakubowska