

Jeri Brown - Biography

"Life is so precious and often overwhelming. Sometimes we need to take time to become obsessed about it...to bathe in the belief that we are here for a purpose and a destiny...to become grounded and firmly rooted in our belief system. I can testify about and ponder over the 'journey of life' and live it in song."

Voice as an Instrument

Ms. Brown's voice can be described as three-dimensional. To the up and down (a four-octave range), she adds an in and out, a plasticity of dynamics stretched and deepened by changes of vowel and tonal color, from breathy contralto to high flute-like tones. Like Sarah Vaughan Brown has a rich complex voice that is always on pitch. Such talent has afforded Jeri Brown a lifetime of vocal experiences from jazz, pop, spiritual, avant-garde, classical, and musical theatre. Like Betty Carter, Brown approaches a song as an instrument and makes her own musical path. "I take a song and work it in my own way. I love the challenge of a musical moment, the immediacy of it."

Biography

History - early training

Jeri Brown was born in Missouri, and has been singing publicly from the age of six. It was in Iowa, on a four-year scholarship, that she studied classical voice under the direction of Frank Summerside. As a result of student performances in mid-western U.S. and Europe, (Sweden, Germany, Norway and Holland), her voice caught the attention of musical directors and composers looking for an imaginative voice with incredible range effortlessly creating aesthetic touches to their contemporary or avant-garde works.

Along with performances with the Cleveland Chamber Orchestra and St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Jeri began performing more stylistic renditions of standards from theatre, film and pop culture.

Drummer and renowned bandleader Bob McKee, former percussionist on the long-running Mike Douglas television series, invited Jeri to become lead singer in several of his combos in Ohio. This exposure and training led to performances with many renowned artists, including Ellis Marsalis, Billy Taylor and Dizzy Gillespie. It was also during this period that Ms. Brown was encouraged to improvise in concert with such emerging artists as Joe Lovano.

Jeri Brown then rapidly moved into the front rank of jazz vocalists from the Cleveland area as resident vocalist with The Cleveland Jazz Orchestra. Besides focusing on classic jazz standards, she developed as an accomplished lyricist, recitalist, concert soloist and recording artist, and has become one of the world's most respected jazz vocalists.

Jazz

Jeri Brown has earned a reputation as one of jazz' most outstanding "artistic" vocalists. With many fine musicians who are labeled "artistic," it's sometimes overlooked how richly musical, thoroughly accessible and enjoyable their music can be. Jeri Brown is focused, ambitious, daring and intent upon creating music that is both well conceived and honest. Brown is well known for performing and recording with passion and dedication.

Committed to the legacy of vocal jazz, Ms. Brown's performances fill the historical spectrum of classic American songbook themes, original jazz compositions, and contemporary world themes with intense vocal improvisations, and include collaborations with diverse, legendary jazz artists.

Jeri Brown has performed or recorded with such musicians as Leon Thomas, John Hicks, Grady Tate, Kirk Lightsey, Betty Carter, Ellis Marsalis, Erik Truffaz, David Murray, D.D. Jackson, Billy Hart, Kenny Werner, Pierre Michelot, John Betsch, Onaje Allan Gumbs, Fred Hersch, Tony Suggs, Michel Donato, Winard Harper, Chico Freeman, Joe Lovano, Cyrus Chestnut, Dr. Billy Taylor, Kenny Wheeler, Avery Sharpe, Rufus Reid, Gerry Gibbs, Seamus Blake and Jimmy Rowles.

In 2001, Jeri Brown created her own record label, Jongleur Productions, committed to providing a forum for the creation of music yet untapped by Ms. Brown and for her productions with new or lesser known talent worldwide. The first release of Jongleur, *Sempre Nina: Tribute to Nina Simone*, is now released and features Jeri Brown with Canadian guitarist Al Sutherland. Jeri hopes to record annually on this label while continuing her recording presence with Justin Time Records. *New Wonderland*, Jeri's tenth album for Justin Time Records is scheduled for worldwide release, February of 2007.

Classical and contemporary

Jeri continues to perform classical concerts primarily for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Vision TV. With notable Canadian ensembles St. John Chamber Quartet and Blue Engine Chamber Quartet. Jeri performs spiritual repertoire, as well as tributes to George Gershwin, John Lewis (Modern Jazz Quartet), Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Oscar Brown Jr., Michel Legrand and Kurt Weill.

In concert

She appears frequently with her own ensembles on stages throughout Europe, Canada and the United States. Ms. Brown has traveled, recorded, adjudicated and performed extensively at festivals, concert series and noted jazz clubs to sold-out audiences worldwide including presidents and royalty.

Humanitarian activities

"I was part of the civil rights era and marched. I was bused to [a black] school and witnessed a lot of racist events in St. Louis. When I finally went to a mixed school we had separate lunches, gym times, and white kids said nasty things. I can't believe I'm old enough to remember this stuff. So today I feel like an advocate for peace. And because the stage is a platform, I don't ever think I'm just a diva adorned in a beautiful dress. I believe performers have the ability to affect humanity and spirituality."

Convinced that it is far better to give than to receive, Jeri annually performs for charitable organizations and produces film and theatre projects that tap into cultural mosaics, discovering and showcasing emerging talent, and presenting cultural, historical tributes.

Several of Jeri's humanitarian efforts have been produced on jazz video and audio performances which continue to rotate in international airplay for BET, BRAVO, World Vision, Radio France and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Montreal Jeri Brown was Vision recipient in 2004, presented in Montreal, Canada, and was honored with Black Theatre Workshop's 19th annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award (previous winners include Oscar Peterson).

Featured in these stunning jazz productions is a pool of dedicated Canadian and international jazz groups joining Jeri. Ms. Brown's Spiritica boasts a veritable array of artists including Canadian artists Jeff Johnston, Joe Sullivan, Remi Bolduc, Simon Sloutsker, Wali Muhamad, as well as renowned guests Kenny Werner, Stephen Scott, Avery Sharpe, Don Thompson, Tony Suggs, Don Braden, John Hicks, Erik Truffaz, John Betsch, Billy Hart, Curtis Lundy and Fred Hersch.

Of note is Jeri Brown's October 2001 "Peace Concert Tour" of France and Turkey - one month after the September 11 tragedy - which was recorded for Radio France.

Ms. Brown regularly gives benefit concerts for social service charities including Centraide and CRUDEM.

In 1994, Jeri Brown founded her own non-profit society, Jongleur Artist Group, committed to providing local talent with education and performance opportunities. It

continues to produce and provide support through scholarship, mentorship, and training. Of note are several participants who have entered university or won praise in performance competitions such as Canadian Idol.

Repertoire

Ms. Brown's performance covers a large repertoire of music, spanning the range from avant garde to jazz standards (e.g., Ellington, Gershwin, Legrand and Porter) to spirituals and classical.

In all of these areas her performance is distinguished by a high level of artistry, musicality and unparalleled ability.

Awards and achievements

JUNO - six nominations (Canada)

Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award (Canada)

Listing in *Jazz Hot* as one of top 50 jazz vocalists of all time (France)

Jazzman - several awards of praise for recordings including CHOC de l'Annee (France)

Featured artist for international guests including President Koivisto of Finland, former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, U.S. Advisor Vernon Jordan, U.S. Consul General Bernadette Allen, among many

Film & theatre

Chanteuse/songwriter/actress/producer Jeri Brown has performed in theatre, film and television in Europe and North America over the course of an illustrious career.

Jeri's interests outside of music have lead her to studies at Columbia University, New York University and The National Film School of Canada, all equipping her with oral cultural screenwriting and film production training. A quick study, Jeri Brown has already been awarded film credits for her roles as associate producer, musical director, creative consultant, in film productions for broadcasters of Canada, United States and Europe.

Film Highlights:

2006 Paul Simon Tribute, as artist coordinator, performer & choral director for audience of 150,000 for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation TV featuring a host of international artists from Elvis Costello to Jamie Cullum

2005 tribute to Nina Simone in live video performance for Global TV, documented on DVD, featured Onaje Allan Gumbs Trio (Global TV-International broadcasts)

2004 Jeri Brown: The Spirit Comes Through (CBC, BRAVO, VISION-Canada broadcasts)

1998 *Once Upon a Summertime: Jeri Brown à Paris* (Northern Line Productions, IO Productions, Jongleur Productions-France broadcasts)

2002 *Jeri Brown Performs: An Evening of Gershwin* Concert (BET, BRAVO, World Affairs Productions-Canada & US broadcasts)

2001 Jeri Brown with Spiritica Concert (Amerimage Productions, BRAVO, CBC-Canada broadcasts)

In a 10-year period, Jeri has been filmed in over 20 performance documentaries for Canadian, US and European film makers including several performances for festivals, concert series and performance spectacles

Theatre Highlights:

2001 *Image in the Mirror: The Triptych*, Jeri's electrifying one woman musical including song highlights recorded of musical title of same name for Justin Time Records-International Tour

2001 *Four Walls of Blue*, by Jeri Brown featuring a 12-member cast, jazz band, and 18 compositions by Ms. Brown (26 show run showcasing some of Atlantic Canada's finest talents) - Nova Scotia, Canada

2000 936 Laurel by playwright Jeri Brown featuring a 6 member cast, jazz band, and 15 compositions by Ms.Brown-Quebec, Canada

1998 portrayal of Ismene in the Canadian premiere and successful run of Broadway musical Gospel at Colonus-Nova Scotia, Canada

1998 Voices of Sassy, Marian, and Ida one-woman musical-Nova Scotia, Canada

Jeri remains active in the theatre community, writing, performing and producing her own musicals for similar theatre stages through her own theatre company, Jongleur Productions, started by Jeri Brown in 2001.

Composer

Jeri Brown's masterful signature vocal improvisations of contemporary and avant-garde jazz are best experienced live as she soars in effortless communication. Recordings with Kenny Wheeler, Fred Hersch, Erik Truffaz, Tony Suggs, Don Thompson, Kenny Werner, and D.D. Jackson, Don Braden, David Murray, and Seamus Blake provide wonderful examples.

Jeri has written and recorded lyrics and melodies in collaboration with such composers as Henry Butler, Kenny Wheeler, Cyrus Chestnut, and Avery Sharpe. Brown's choral arrangements of compositions by Abdullah Ibrahim, Jimmy Rowles, Leon Thomas and others along with her abilities as instrumental arranger have won Jeri special recognition.

Biographical highlights

Beyond the realm of music, Jeri Brown holds several degrees in such fields as Counseling, Education and English. Such diversity of studies, along with a growing performance record, has led Jeri into many different teaching opportunities, including the Oberlin Conservatory Of Music, Cleveland State University and The University Of Akron - all in Ohio. Jeri has also taught at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, and has held several teaching positions in Canada, including Concordia University, where she is a tenured faculty member, and McGill University, both in Montreal, Québec, and at Nova Scotia's St. Francis Xavier University. □