

Judy Niemack – vocals, educator

"If you want to know what real jazz singing can be (but rarely is), listen to Judy Niemack...She is a musician in the truest sense, having mastered her instrument (a beautiful one), and her chosen language and crafted her own style" Dan Morgenstern

Judy NIEMACK is a real jazz singer. Her delivery of lyrics is full of emotion and elegance, while in her scat singing she is a consummate musician, exploring the music like a virtuoso horn player.

Having completed her Classical voice studies as a coloratura soprano, she comes out of the mainstream jazz tradition, breaking new ground with original lyrics, arrangements and a modern approach to standards.

Judy has a dual career as performer and vocal jazz educator.

Throughout her career, Judy Niemack has accomplished a great deal as a singer, educator, lyricist, composer, and inspiration to younger jazz vocalists.

Yet with all that she has done thus far, one gets the impression that the best is yet to come. "I love standards and have performed them all of my life but this is a new era and it is time to create new music," she says. "I'm open to all forms of vocal improvisation; I'm interested in the lifelong task of mastering the art of music making, and in pushing the vocal art form forward to new places."

Born and raised in Pasadena, California, Judy gained her early experience singing in her church choir. She first heard jazz through her mother's Nancy Wilson records, and discovered that she could easily sing harmonies when she and her sister sang background vocals behind her brother, who played guitar and sang lead. As a child and as a teenager, she sang in a wide variety of settings including musical theater, rock bands, with bluegrass groups and in a jazz vocal quartet.

Judy studied classical singing and was encouraged to make it her focus, but the turning point in her young career was when she met the great tenor-saxophonist Warne Marsh, who followed in the footsteps of his teacher pianist Lennie Tristano by becoming an important jazz educator. "I became Warne's first vocal student. He treated me like a horn player. He assigned me solos by Charlie Parker, Roy Eldridge and others to learn. I learned about improvising from him. He called it instant composition." Judy attended Pasadena City College where she had lessons with alto saxophonist Gary Foster, and studied classical singing at the New England Conservatory and the Cleveland Institute Of Music.

When she returned to the Los Angeles area, she continued studying with Marsh and, after moving to New York in 1977, her first important gig was performing at the Village Vanguard for a week with Marsh. She made her recording debut, leading the first of her twelve CDs, "By Heart" for the Sea Breeze label in 1978, which documented her association with the saxophonist. "During that period, I was strictly an improviser, with little thought given to entertaining or paying attention to the audience. But eventually I started focusing on the lyrics, and how to communicate them, and then I grew as a singer."

Starting in the late 1970s, Judy became a talented composer and a lyricist who wrote words to such pieces as Clifford Brown's "Daahoud," Thelonious Monk's "Misterioso," Bill Evans' "Interplay," Gigi Gryce's "Minority," Richie Powell's "Time" and Duke Jordan's "Jordu," and songs by the likes of Lee Konitz, Pat Metheny, Dexter Gordon, Gigi Gryce, Kenny Dorham, Curtis Fuller, Bob Brookmeyer, Richie Beirach, Don Grolnick, Steve Slagle, Mike Stern, Jeanfrancois Prins, Elmo Hope, Larry Schneider, Kirk Nurock, Johnny Griffin, Michel Herr, Peter Bernstein, and many others. One of the driving forces behind her writing is the desire to have lyrics that are more modern and relevant than many that are part of the famous but overly familiar songs of the 1930s and '40s.

Thanks to her beautiful voice, fearless improvising, impressive musicianship and versatility, Judy Niemack has since worked with many of the "who's who" of jazz, including pianists Jacki Byard, Fred Hersch, Kenny Werner, Cedar Walton, Kenny Barron, Jim McNeely, Steve Kuhn, and Kirk Lightsey, saxophonists Lee Konitz, Joe Lovano, Gary Bartz, and James Moody, the great harmonica player Toots Thielemans, flugelhornist Clark Terry, bassists Ray Drummond and Eddie Gomez, drummers Billy Higgins, Joey Baron, Victor Lewis, Billy Hart, and Adam Nussbaum, the New York Voices, and Danish Radio and WDR Big Bands.

As a performer, Judy has thus far recorded 12 albums as a leader including her debut *By Heart* (seabreeze) with Warne Marsh, *Blue Bop* (Freelance) with Cedar Walton, *Long As You're Living* (Freelance), *Heart's Desire* (Stash), a set of duets with pianist Kenny Barron, *Straight Up* (Freelance) with Kenny Werner, duets with pianist Mal Waldron called *Mingus, Monk and Mal* (Freelance), *Night And The Music* (Freelance), *About Time* (Sony Jazz) with Lee Konitz and Jeanfrancois Prins, *What's Going On* (Temps), *Blue Nights* (Blujazz) with Gary Bartz and Jim McNeely, *In the Sundance* (Blujazz), in 2017, *Listening to You* (Sunnyside) with pianist Dan Tepfer, and in 2019, *New York Stories* (Sunnyside) with Jim McNeely and the Danish Radio Big Band.

"Blue Nights shows off my mainstream traditional side. I recorded it to share a modern take on some of my favorite songs, which I have long loved. In the Sundance celebrates my favorite season: Summer. And *Listening to You* is an improvised, in-the moment exploration of songs; just voice and piano, creating something new from something old...".

Judy Niemack started teaching jazz singing and vocal improvisation in the late 1970s. She has since become one of the most influential educators in jazz, and a pioneer of vocal jazz education in Europe. She has taught at the New School, William Patterson University, Long Island University, and New York City College and was on the staff of the Janice Borla Vocal Jazz Camp for 20 years. After moving to Europe in 1992, she joined the jazz faculties at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels and Antwerp in Belgium and the Royal Conservatory of Den Hague in Holland. Two years later she became the first Professor of Vocal Jazz in Germany. For 13 years she's taught at Musikene Conservatory in San Sebastian, Spain, and now leads the department at the Jazz Institut Berlin, giving masterclasses throughout the world.

“Our generation is probably the first to pass on information to younger singers willingly and very openly. What I love about teaching is being surrounded by music all day long, every day. I love being with singers and helping out younger vocalists, leading people onto the path towards where they want to go.”

Judy’s vocal improvisation method book and CD “Hear It And Sing It! – Exploring Modal Jazz” was published by Second Floor Music in 2004, and her “Pro-Vocal Jazz Standards” was published by Hal Leonard in 2008. About her latest book, Judy says, “My third book, “Hear It And Sing It! – Exploring the Blues” includes performances not only by me, but also by Sheila Jordan, Mark Murphy and Darmon Meader. I think it will help to raise the bar in vocal jazz education.

In general, I hope to continue doing what I’m doing: performing, teaching, writing lyrics, working on new collaborations, and always creating new and interesting music.” Judy Niemack looks forward to the future with optimism and enthusiasm. Whatever the future holds, one can be certain that Judy Niemack’s future projects will be inventive, stimulating and full of joyful surprises.