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Jackie Allen, Vocalist



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Biography

A Wisconsin native, Jackie grew up in a musical family. Her father, Louis (Gene) Allen is a Dixieland tuba player who inspired each of his five children to play a different brass instrument (young Jackie's first instrument was the French horn). She came up listening to the rock and pop music of her siblings and early jazz and folk music from her parents; everything from the Beatles to Barbara Streisand, Joni Mitchell to Nat King Cole, The Kingston Trio to Bob Dylan and the River Boat Ramblers. "It didn't occur to me to categorize any of this disparate music. It was all just music and I was pulled toward what moved me." While attending the University of Wisconsin- Madison Allen discovered the great jazz singers Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Nancy Wilson. They soon led her to Mark Murphy, Helen Merrill, Shirley Horn and Jimmy Scott, taking her deeper into the music. "Their interpretations were so distinct, you could say they were my mentors." In college, she studied with jazz pianist and Professor of Theory, Joan Wildman, Director of Jazz Ensembles, Les Thimmig and renowned jazz bassist Richard Davis, himself a prominent artist on 1960's Blue Note recordings. Later, in Milwaukee, she performed five nights a week with keyboard great Mel Rhyne (organist for Wes Montgomery), honing her interpretive skills and expanding her repertoire. "You could say I cut my teeth with Mel. He's the real-deal and working together as a duo 5 nights a week for 3 years helped make me a stronger and more confident singer."

Jackie's extraordinary talent has taken her across the globe. She has toured Morocco as part of a cultural goodwill tour, Brazil with her voice/bass duo, and China where she was the only jazz artist to headline at the Beijing Music Festival. She performs frequently in Europe having appeared twice at the North Sea Jazz Festival, toured Northern Italy, and performed at the Thessaloniki Jazz Festival in Greece, the Mittenwald and Reutlingen Festivals in Germany, Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Scottish Double Bass Festival. In Paris Allen has been featured at Chatelet Hall and at the Paris 2008 Bass Festival with bassist and husband Hans Sturm.

Nationally she has toured both coasts and in between appearing numerous times in Los Angeles at Catalina's, Oakland at Yoshi's, San Diego at Humphrey's, and in New York City at the Blue Note and The Josef Papp Public Theater. She has performed at the International Association of Jazz Educators Conference in New York and New Orleans. She has performed with the Chicago Jazz Philharmonic, Johnny Frigo, and Judy Roberts at venues such as Chicago's Millennium Park

and Ravinia. She has appeared with orchestras including the Muncie Symphony Orchestra and The Lawrence Chamber Orchestra. With her own group she has performed at the Detroit, and Chicago International Jazz Festivals. In the mid-west she has appeared at Dazzle in Denver, The Jazz Factory in Louisville, Jazz Kitchen in Indianapolis, Fire Fly in Ann Arbor, Night Town in Cleveland, The Dakota in Minneapolis, Summerfest and Pabst Theater in Milwaukee, Green Mill and Jazz Showcase in Chicago.

A highly respected jazz educator, Allen is on faculty at the Chicago Center for the Performing Arts (Roosevelt University). She has taught at Elmhurst College, Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music, Bloom School of Jazz and the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music in Milwaukee. She is frequently featured with university jazz ensembles as a guest performer and clinician including, DePaul University, the University of Wisconsin- Madison, Lawrence University (WI), the University of Iowa, Ball State University (IN), and Tainan Women's Junior College. She co-produced and starred in the sold-out *America 1941* with actor John Mahoney (Martin Crane from TV's *Frasier*) to benefit The National Academy For Local Schools and has served multiple terms on the Board of Governors for the Recording Academy (Grammy Awards).

Critical Acclaim

“...There's only one way to describe it: Wow!”

-Christopher Loudon, Jazz Times

“A model of lustrous tone and clear headed energy, then waxes blue...exercising the fine art of understatement. “

-Josef Woodward, Down Beat

“Her gift is utterly distinctive and even innovative, since there isn't another singer out there who phrases like her... a pop masterpiece...It's revelatory and sounds effortless. “

-Thomas Jurek, Billboard, All Music Guide

“Jackie Allen... possesses a voice that combines the expressiveness of Annie Lennox and the pitch of Rickie Lee Jones, while achieving it's own bright, dramatic sound...sassy... tender. Download this.”

-V.R. Peterson, People Magazine

“A sparking performance... enhanced by her warm, pliable voice and expansive range, Allen's greatest strength was her sheer musicality and the way in which she both framed and interpreted her songs.... interpretations that found an amiable balance between storytelling and jazz spontaneity...Allen also revealed an admirable willingness to explore and add new material to the familiar jazz lexicon.”

-Don Heckman, Los Angeles Times

“You can't help absorbing Jackie's emotional pull. She gives her audience a personal reflection of her inner soul that everyone can enjoy.”

-Jim Santella, All About Jazz

“This new amalgam of pop-jazz-folk-funk-gospel is pure Allen, just what she wants her gifted voice to be saying...words flow from her exquisite voice, time after time. Allen often sounds like she's sharing her inner most secrets and deepest fears... this feels like a very real 21st century American woman, struggling between her feminine resilience and the vulnerabilities of an ageless girl.”

-Kevin Lynch, The Capitol Times

“... musically sophisticated and artistically daring... she knows how to utterly reinvent the most familiar tunes...Allen has a knack for unearthing long-forgotten tunes.”

-Howard Reich, Chicago Tribune

“Expressive power, heartfelt sparkle and stirring allure.”

-Northwest Jazz Profile

“Allen's got an entire rainbow of emotional colors and, of course, the great musicality in her singing.”

-Critic's choice, L.A. City Beat

Discography

Starry Night (Avant Bass, 2009)

With *Starry Night*, Jackie Allen celebrates her ninth release; a live recording with orchestra featuring star-themed songs arranged expressly for her by seven gifted professionals who have written for such luminaries as Duke Ellington, Frank Sinatra, Doc Severinsen, Bobby McFerrin and Diana Krall.

Deftly accompanied by the Muncie Symphony Orchestra and her combo, Jackie's performances are, in the words of jazz icon Fred Sturn, "artistic, elegant, passionate, and thoroughly engaging." Hoagy Carmichael's *Star Dust* is completely re-imagined by former Cincinnati Symphony composer-in-residence Frank Proto. Bassist and arranger John Clayton breathes fresh air into *Star Eyes* (DePaul/Raye) and *I've Never Been In Love Before* (Frank Loesser). Pianist and arranger Bill Cunliffe's lush style graces *Lost In the Stars* (Anderson/Weill) and the Sergio Mendez hit *So Many Stars*. Other Latin standards include Jobim's *If You Never Come To Me* artfully arranged by Mark Buselli and Michael Kocour's Brazilian interpretation of Micheal Legrand's *You Must Believe In Spring*. Kocour also puts humor and swing into the tongue & cheek *When In Rome* (Coleman & Leigh).

Matt Harris penned the arrangement of Don McLean's popular *Vincent* (*Starry, Starry Night*). Allen conceived a medley of three lullaby waltzes: *Hush-a-bye Mountain* from the movie *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and two rarely heard Alec Wilder ballads, *The Star Lighter* and *Star Wish*, realized in a romantic Frank Proto arrangement. Allen's haunting original *Moon Of Deception* is expanded for orchestra by composer/arranger Jody Nagel.

The Muncie Symphony Orchestra's Artistic Director, Bohuslav Rattay, attended a concert in Chicago at the Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park where he heard Jackie featured with the Chicago Jazz Philharmonic to a crowd of over 10,000. Rattay was looking for inspiration to create a special concert to celebrate Muncie Symphony's 60th anniversary. With Jackie, he found it and the idea for *Starry Night* was born.

Tangled (Blue Note Records, 2006)

Tangled, Allen's remarkable Blue Note Records release, explores soundscapes that pay homage to classic and contemporary standards while crafting originals that richly complement the covers. The theme and title of the disc is apropos, "I like singing about the complexities of relationships, the entanglements," says Allen.

Produced by Eric Hochberg, *Tangled* is an eleven-song collection featuring five originals including the title track. Standards by Rodgers and Hart and Johnny Mandel are balanced by offerings from contemporary singer-songwriters Van Morrison, Donald Fagen, and Randy Newman. Fagen's tune, *Do Wrong Shoes*, had never been previously recorded. Allen shares, "Fagen sent me a cassette recording of him singing and accompanying himself on piano. I loved it and decided to put a swing feel to it. It's the most popular tune of the album when we tour." Fagen says of her, "Jackie Allen ranks very high among all other present day singers.

She gets the harmonies of the songs as completely as she trusts her way with time. Her phrasing is assured, suggesting a unique kind of tenderness. The emotional impact she conveys is extraordinary."

Love Is Blue (A440 Music Group, 2005)

Writing in *Jazz Times* of *Love Is Blue*, Christopher Loudon remarked, "As hybrids go, Allen is a rare breed. Her firm roots are clearly folk-rock...but they are wedded to a keen jazz sensibility." His assessment of *Love Is Blue*, which ranges from a tune associated with Frank Sinatra to one by Annie Lennox: "Dazzling." Executive Producer Kent Anderson brought in producer/arranger Rob Mathes (Tony Bennett, Carly Simon) for the session. "Rob said he wasn't used to working where bands played live in the studio and I also don't think he expected the level of musicianship in Chicago to rival that of New York, but I think he was soon convinced otherwise. Rob has great musical ears and arranging chops and allowed us room to express our own ideas." Pianist Laurence Hobgood wrote two arrangements of Jackie's originals, *Moon Of Deception* and *Go* and bassist Hans Sturm contributed two songs including *You Become My Song* (with Bobby Hutcherson). Standards include *I'll Be Around*, *A Taste of Honey*, and *Lazy Afternoon*, re-released on a compilation on EMI.

Men In My Life (A440 Music Group, 2003)

The concept for *The Men In My Life* recording originated from Ralph Jungheim, a Grammy-winning producer Jackie had worked with on the west coast. A tribute to favorite male influences and inspirations, Allen explores a wide range of repertoire. "Mixing up music from the 40s thru the 80s was fun and a challenge, juxtaposing Sinatra against Herb Alpert and Sting against Paul Simon; older harmonies were stripped down to their essentials and simpler songs were re-harmonized to create more of a balance" shares Allen. It was the first album where she actually invested her own money. She continues, "It was a labor of love and I felt that I had gotten smart enough to get a co-producer (Eric Hochberg) so I could stand on just one side of the microphone." Highlights include *Come Fly With Me*, the Sinatra swagger replaced by a sensuous bossa, *The Bad And The Beautiful*, designed as a duet with Kurt Elling, a fiery version of *Spain*, and the popular adventurous rendition of *Sting's Tea In The Sahara*.

Santa Baby (RA Records, 2000/2002)

Jackie's collaboration with "Chicago's Favorite Jazz Woman," pianist/vocalist Judy Roberts, began in the late 90's as they began performing regularly in top Chicago jazz venues such as the Green Mill, Pops For Champagne, Jazz Showcase and Carlton Hotel. They recorded their first album, now a perennial favorite, *Santa Baby* in 2000 after increasing demand for holiday programs. "When the second pressing sold out, fans suggested we record another holiday album but we decided instead to add 6 more songs to the existing recording and re-release it as a collectors edition in 2002." Nineteen songs in all, *Santa Baby* features many of the Christmas

classics: Let It Snow, The Christmas Song, Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas, to the more modern What Are You Doing New Years Eve, Christmas Time Is Here (from Charlie Brown fame) and Blue Christmas. The recording features a few rarely recorded gems such as Claude Thornhill's Snow Fall and the poignant Some Children See Him. Winter Wonderland is an audience favorite with additional lyrics about snow- birds fleeing to warmer climates. Judy interjects beautiful piano solos in their unique vocal arrangements. The Chicago Tribune calls it, "The most endearing of holiday recordings."

Autumn Leaves (RA Records, 2001)

The vocal duo of Jackie Allen and Judy Roberts found material for their second album Autumn Leaves from nights of spontaneous and developed arrangements inspired by requests. A collection of swing era standards, the recording features a rich variety; the title track and Charade sung in French and English simultaneously, a Thelonious Monk medley, Dizzy Gillespie's A Night In Tunisia, three beautiful ballads and the 50's novelty, An Occasional Man. Allen recalls, "Judy, while at the piano, originally preferred not to sing, opting to focus on just accompanying. I assumed the audience wanted to hear us sing together, being a novelty and I also loved the vocal interplay. We do a little of each." The duo has performed at Ravinia Festival, North Sea Jazz Festival and American Embassy in Holland as part of a cultural exchange, representing the city of Chicago.

Landscapes – Bass Meets Voice (Red Mark Records, 1999)

Landscapes – Bass Meets Voice, a collaboration with bassist (and now husband) Hans Sturm, is described by Jazz News as "a 72 minute daring, serious, sensuous and often intense musical experience. The flexibility of both musicians is striking... her voice takes on more shapes and forms than one has the right to expect from the human voice. Sturm is a master of the double bass. He makes it sound like a guitar, a violin, a horn as he plucks, slides and bows. He does more than accompany Allen, he is her equal partner." Sturm's contributions include the title track, a five movement modern oratorio describing geographic locations, eye-opening twists on standards such as Round Midnight, I Want To Be Happy, Green Dolphin St., and Dindi. Jackie shares their beginnings, "We met in collage and I remember Hans playing me a duo recording of Sheila Jordan and Harvey Swartz. They knocked me out! We decided to try the same thing and before long we were getting regular work. It really stretched us both musically, and surprisingly, audiences listened. We went our separate ways after school and years later re-connected in Chicago, collaborating again." While opening for a bigger act at the International Bass Festival in Scotland, bassist and producer Frank Proto heard the duo and offered to produce their first CD together. Landscapes was recorded live in front of a studio audience. Jazz vocalist Kurt Elling calls it: "A great new vocal sounds record – forward looking, smart, sexy, ethereal. A very strong vibe."

Which? (Naxos Jazz, 1999)

“As close to a perfect album as we’re likely to hear this year” writes Kirk Silsbee for Jazziz Magazine. Two-time Grammy award-winning producer Ralph Jungheim recalls the session: “Being a transplant on the Left Coast from Chicago, I was long aware of the very deep talent pool there. I checked with engineer Jim Brown for some recommendations and Jackie Allen was at the top of his list. She sent me her first CD and I liked what I heard so I made a deal with Naxos.” Jungheim assembled the best-of-the-west for the live session, which included pianist/arranger Bill Cunliffe, saxophonists Red Holloway and Gary Foster, trombonist Bruce Paulson, bassist Jim Hughart, and drummer Roy McCurdy. Jungheim continues, “We first met at LAX and into the studio we went with Bill, who had sketched out the charts. With no rehearsal, it couldn’t have gone better! Upon discovering we were a few minutes shy of the contracted time, Jackie and Bill adlibbed My Romance, one of the highlights of the CD. Which? is arguably the happiest collaboration of my 52 CDs.”

Never Let Me Go (Lake Shore Jazz, 1994)

With a four star rating, Bob Protzman of the St. Paul Pioneer Press said of Jackie’s debut CD, “Forget the jazz singers being touted on either coast; check out this superb singer from Chicago. You will not hear a better new singer.” Shortly after moving to Chicago from Milwaukee in the early 90’s Jackie not only found a jazz audience but an investor for her self-produced first CD. With the help of talented local musicians: Willie Pickens, Larry Gray, Robert Shy, Edward Petersen, Bradley Williams and Joel Spencer, Allen created catchy and memorable arrangements of Cole Porter’s It’s Alright With Me, Leonard Bernstein’s Lucky To Be Me, and Alec Wilders’ Moon and Sand. An earlier collaborator, keyboardist Mel Rhyne contributed Teach Me A Song, one of three waltzes on the record. Allen closes the album with Johnny Frigo’s great ballad, Detour Ahead. Frigo said of Allen’s version, “Jackie’s interpretation is the best I’ve heard since Billie Holiday”. Allen included three originals with critical success, including So Wrong, later recorded by vocalist Nnenna Freelon on the Sony Columbia label.