

jennifer lee • vocalist • pianist • guitarist • • composer • lyricist •



Nine years is a long time between albums, but Jennifer Lee has been busy taking her music into rarely explored emotional terrain. *My Shining Hour*, the third album by the esteemed Bay Area jazz vocalist, guitarist, and pianist, reintroduces an artist long known as a gifted interpreter of the American and Brazilian Songbooks. But with her ensemble the Ever-Expanding Universe and a stellar cast of special guests, including trumpet legend Randy Brecker, bass master Bob Magnusson, Grammy Award-winning violinist Mads Tolling, and percussion maestro John Santos, Lee has emerged as a songwriter with an unusual gift for evoking uncanny experiences, hard-won wisdom, unbridled joy, and liminal states of consciousness.

Her evolution from her former creative identity as an arranger/interpreter to her present calling as a composer took Lee by surprise. "I always wrote a little bit, but I certainly never thought of myself as a songwriter," she says. "Then a shift happened and all this music started channeling in. It's like some crazy, overactive muse attached itself to me."

While *My Shining Hour* marks a sea change for Lee, she's still swimming with longtime collaborators, which is one reason why her music sounds so finely wrought and fully formed. Like on her previous, critically-hailed albums, 2003's *Jaywalkin'* and 2009's *Quiet Joy* (both on Peter Sprague's label SBE Records), Lee draws on two deep pools of talent from San Diego and the Bay Area. The line of continuity runs through Peter Sprague, the brilliant San Diego guitarist known for his extensive work with Chick Corea, Charles McPherson, and Hubert Laws. For Lee, the collaboration has provided, among many other things, an education. "Peter is an extraordinary musician and a deeply soulful player," she says. "Working with him over the years, watching how he'll reharmonize or phrase a line, I've learned so much. It's definitely influenced my writing."

While she continues to perform as Jennifer Lee, the artist's full name is Jennifer Lee Sevison, which is how she publishes and copyrights her songs to avoid confusion with other musicians recording as Jennifer Lee. Born in Redwood City, California, on August 6, 1964, and raised in Menlo Park, Lee attended Woodside High School, but in her senior year she transferred to Menlo-Atherton High as a pianist to take advantage of the school's respected jazz program.

She continued her jazz piano studies at Foothill College, often accompanying vocalists, all the while nursing her secret desire to sing. She didn't take the plunge until an early, unwanted glimpse at mortality radically changed her priorities in the late 1980s, when she dropped out of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst to tend to her stricken father.

"My dad got really sick and I came back from school to take care of him," Lee says. "He died the next year. He was only 51. That really brought things into focus for me. I realized that none of us knows how long we have here on planet earth, so I'd better do what I want to do now."

After her father's passing, she returned to the Foothill College music department, but instead of backing other singers she took over the microphone herself. Subsequently studying with esteemed Bay Area jazz singer Kitty Margolis, Lee gradually worked up the courage to start performing in public.

"It took me so long to come to singing – to finally admit to myself that this is really what I want to do. Then it took another decade plus for the songwriter in me to emerge. I'm the epitome of the late bloomer," says Lee, who honed her jazz technique on a succession of regular gigs around the Bay Area. She made her first appearance on CD in 2001 on *Quintessential*, an album featuring three tracks each by five Bay Area singers, including Jenna Mammina & Cathi Walkup.

Lee's 2009 release *Quiet Joy* – an exciting mix of originals, standards and Brazilian songs – was a favorite of the late Bud Spangler (drummer / Grammy-nominated producer) who called it "a JOY from start to finish." Her 2003 CD *Jaywalkin'* was named "finest debut of the year, big label or small" by Dan McClenaghan of All About Jazz.

She teamed up with Peter Sprague on that debut, and since then his Spragueland Studios in Encinitas has turned into a creative refuge and laboratory. Or in the case of *My Shining Hour*, the Southland retreat served as a chrysalis from which Lee has reemerged after 9 years to take flight as a brilliantly-hued singer/songwriter, curious, self-possessed, and unafraid.

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