

Shirley Horn

live
at
the 4.
QUEENS



Shirley Horn live at the 4 queens



1. SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME (3:12)
2. LOVER MAN (OH WHERE CAN YOU BE?) (5:14)
3. JUST FOR A THRILL (5:10)
4. HI-FLY (7:41)
5. YOU'D BE SO NICE TO COME HOME TO (3:51)
6. MEDITATION (9:03)
7. THE BOY FROM IPANEMA (5:22)
8. ISN'T IT ROMANTIC (12:10)
9. BLUES FOR BIG SCOTIA (2:58)

shirley horn
vocals & piano

charles ables
bass

steve williams
drums

Produced for release by ZEV FELDMAN
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Las Vegas, Nevada
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When I learned that we at Resonance were releasing a wonderful, previously unissued recording by Shirley Horn, it was immediately clear to me that this was an event that called for the ultimate album package; one that would serve not only to help cast welcome attention on a wonderful and underserved neglected artist, but would also serve as a tribute to her memory. And because there's never been a book written about Shirley, this release afforded us the perfect opportunity to assemble new reference materials about her.

We're pleased to feature here an array of voices that we hope will paint a three-dimensional portrait of Shirley Horn. We lead off with a piece by author and journalist James Gavin, well-known for his perceptive explorations on music and those who make it. For perspectives from people who participated in the event itself, we have accounts by Shirley's long-time drummer, Steve Williams, and Brian Sanders, one of the producers of the live broadcast of the show on public radio. Sheila Jordan, the great jazz singer who was a close friend of Shirley's shares her memories of Shirley. For a local Washington D.C. flavor, D.C. radio personality Rusty Hasaan, whom I grew up listening to, shares a remembrance followed by words from Shirley's daughter, Rainy Smith, and Shirley's manager, Sheila Mathis. Lastly, I wanted to include the voices of two of Shirley's producers, so I conducted interviews with Richard Seidel and Jean-Philippe Allard, who worked closely with her.

As to my own experience with Shirley, listening to these performances, took me back in time. Of course, Shirley's music transported me, as it always has, not only because of her transcendent ability to evoke moods and emotions, but also because listening to Shirley's live performance took me back two decades to a time when I was just starting out in the music business and I first met her.

Shirley Horn and I both came from Washington D.C. Technically, I'm from North Potomac, Maryland, a suburb of D.C., but I regard myself as a Washingtonian, like Shirley. I began my career at PolyGram Records and Universal Music Group in 1994 in New York, but I moved back to D.C. in 1999. Among other things, I worked the Verve catalog at PolyGram/UMG and Shirley's music was prominent at Verve in those days, as she was a member of the Verve family.

Whenever during my tenure at PolyGram/UMG we released a new Shirley Horne album, it was a memorable event for me. From my earliest days at PolyGram I had at least some role in all of Shirley's releases. I began as an intern mailing posters to record stores. This led to a promotion to merchandiser (i.e., a poster hanger) in retail accounts in New York City. And this ultimately led to my being responsible for regional marketing and sales for her Verve albums. And for me, it was especially rewarding being around for the third act of Shirley's professional life, which, thanks to her wonderful Verve albums produced by Richard Seidel, was by far the most commercially successful stage of her career.

From 1999 through 2005, the year Shirley died, I was based in Washington D.C., working for UMG as its jazz and classical music representative. This meant, among other things, I was the Verve Records representative. Because I was in D.C., I had the opportunity to see Shirley many times when she performed locally and elsewhere on the East Coast, whether it was at New York City's Village Vanguard, Zanzibar Blue in Philadelphia or the Kennedy Center and Bohemian Caverns in Washington. Usually, I was the person who arranged for a retailer — often Melody Records or Tower Records — to come to wherever Shirley was performing and sell CDs at those venues.

I have my own fond memories of Shirley. More than once, she invited me to hang

out with the band after the show. Bassist Charles Ables would usually leave early, but Shirley, Steve Williams and Shirley's manager, Sheila Mathis, would usually linger for a while after her shows. From among the many times I hung out with Shirley, I have two particularly vivid memories. The first was one evening when she performed at Bohemian Caverns in Washington. Shirley greeted me after her set. "Zev, come sit down and join me for a drink," she said. "What are you having I asked?" "A Belvedere martini," she said. "Sounds, good, I'll have one of those," I remember saying. I'd never had a Belvedere martini before, but after that drink, I NEEDED to walk down U street to Ben's Chili Bowl for a late night chili smoke and chips before deciding how to make my way out to Gaithersburg, where I lived back then.

And there was a particularly memorable night in Philadelphia while Shirley was doing a two-night run at Zanzibar Blue on Broad Street. After the first set, Sheila came over to me and said that a patron and his wife were hosting the band for a late night dinner at their home in Northeast Philly and would I be able to join them? All you had to do was ask this kid in his late-20s! As I said, it was memorable. We showed up at the house at around 12:30 and after cocktails Sheila, Steve and I explored this huge home. We noticed a Lincoln Continental parked in the driveway. That wasn't so unusual. But when we got closer, we saw that the car was full of mulch, which covered the seats, and that flowers were growing inside the car. I guess you could have called that Lincoln a very expensive planter.

At around 3:00 AM, we gathered in a dining room where Shirley, Sheila, Steve, the couple who owned the house, their houseboy and I had a very late dinner of soul food. The houseboy and the male host flirted openly with each other. It felt like I was somewhere in "The Twilight Zone." Nevertheless, the company was great. We stayed until six or seven in the morning. I remember the sun coming up before we left. It was a night I'll never forget.

I feel honored to have worked on this release. I feel very close to it, not just because I love Shirley's music, but because I felt close to her personally. I hope you'll enjoy this album as much as I do.

ZEV FELDMAN

*North Potomac, Maryland
June, 2015*



Monday Night Jazz at the Four Queens

by BRIAN SANDERS

For about twelve years, the Four Queens Hotel and Casino presented live jazz every Monday night in its French Quarter Lounge. Of those more than 600 Monday-night performances, approximately half were recorded or broadcast locally by local public station KNPR and later aired nationally over Public Radio International. A limited number of broadcasts were also heard on an early satellite network in Japan and some, like this performance from 1988 by Shirley Horn, have been given new life.

The broadcast version of Monday Night Jazz was called Four Queens Jazz Night from Las Vegas, a not-too-subtle way of getting the name of the sponsor into the title, not unlike the old sustaining radio programs of yesteryear when oil companies, soap manufacturers and tobacco producers were similarly aligned with their network radio shows. We usually just called it “Jazz Night.”

Alan Grant, a long-time fixture on New York jazz radio was the impresario of the weekly affair. I don’t know the exact business arrangement between Grant and the Queens. I know he booked all the acts, and was the onstage host for the live shows (missing maybe one show in the entire run of the series) as well hosting the national radio broadcasts.

My role on Monday Night Jazz varied. When the series was young and only broadcast live locally, I was the board-op back at the station. Others did the technical things. Later I did the recordings, edited and produced the show for broadcast and assisted other engineers when they were available, sometimes running the house sound.

It was the high point of my career in many ways. I was working with some of the greatest names in jazz. On the other end of my microphones were people I had known about for many years including Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis, Phil Woods, Harry “Sweets” Edison, Dorothy Donegan, Bobby Hutcherson and many others. Saxophonist Jerome Richardson gave me a life lesson during an all-night drinking session after his appearance at the Queens. I casually mentioned to Eddie Harris that I was a saxophonist and asked him what I thought would be a simple question. In answer, he sat me down next to him at the piano and did about an hour of theory. Joe Williams and Marlena Shaw lived in town and were both frequent performers on Monday Night Jazz but also would stop to sit in or just hang out.

While the music was usually good — and sometimes very good — the scene on Monday nights could be fantastic. There were the regulars: Nick, a dapper former dealer always dressed to kill in a three-piece suit, perfectly tied necktie and a gold safety pin in his collar; trombonist Carl Fontana talking about his frustrating golf game and always keeping an eye peeled for results on the keno board; Steve, the banker, who was fond of the wide variety of “magic water” available at the bar; Chuck, a former Strip bartender, who loved to trade stories about sports cars with Bill who did his speed thing in a Cessna; and waitresses costumed in short skirts and halter tops while the hostess rocked an evening gown.

It was also the kind of place where anybody might stop by, including the famous radio announcer William B. Williams of “Make Believe Ballroom” fame, Buck Ram, Billy Eckstine, Liza Minnelli, Freddie Cole (Nat’s brother), newspaper writers

and sportscasters. After so many years on the air in New York and Miami, Alan had a lot of buddies and many came by the Queens at one time or another. The cast of characters always amazed me.

Music at the Four Queens happened seven nights a week, often with three different bands performing over the course of a single day. The first band might start in the mid-afternoon and play until seven when another band would take over for a few hours, to be relieved by a group performing until two or three in the morning.

Afternoons were handled for many years by a local entertainer who called himself “Dondino.” He tried to evoke Tom Jones with a similar look, song list and costume. Dondino worked a good deal and his band included three horns and many of the local jazz players eventually worked with him over the years, myself included. Dondino was famous among musicians for the list of rules that circulated pre-internet via photocopies. These rules included things like, “no working for any other bands,” “no smiling on the bandstand,” “no handshaking on the bandstand” and various other stipulations regarding deportment and appearance.

The evening shift was reserved for national acts that would appear for two or sometimes three weeks at a stretch. Cajun fiddler Doug Kershaw was a frequent visitor, as were various incarnations of the Ink Spots, Buck Ram’s Platters and other mostly pop acts. Occasionally these evening performers had jazz roots. Frank Sinatra, Jr. appeared several times a year backed by a full big band; singers Chris Connor, Marlena Shaw and Billy Eckstine also all held long engagements.

At first, Monday night was the off-night for the headline performers and on those nights the room was either dark or featured local talent. Not long after arriving in Las Vegas in early 1982, Alan Grant approached the hotel with the idea of keeping the room open with jazz performers, much as he had hosted jazz sessions in New York in the sixties and seventies before retiring to work in the family business.

Higher-ups at the Queens agreed to give the jazz series a six-week trial run. Business turned out to be good and Monday Night Jazz at the Four Queens became a fixture until 1997. Grant enlisted local NPR station KNPR to broadcast some of the music live and convinced the Queens that supporting a national broadcast of the programs would help with the hotel’s national marketing efforts. Local live broadcasts were underway by the fall of 1982 and the series went national the following year. The series ran 13 years and was one of the longest-running national jazz series on radio for a time.

The Four Queens Hotel and Casino occupied half a city block on Freemont Street at Third. With its attached parking garage and casino hotel, the Queens was one of the larger downtown properties. A circular driveway on its southeast side accommodated drop-offs and valet parking. The entrance featured gleaming brass fixtures and a mirrored ceiling. Up a few steps to the hotel lobby, the casino was to the right. Proceeding down a short passageway you’d pass a small gift store, a snack bar and one or two similar shops, then you’d be at one end of the main casino floor, proportioned like a football field, smaller by half. On the right were the poker area, restrooms and the French Quarter Lounge, home to Jazz Night.

Over the years the lounge underwent a couple of remodels but remained basically the same for the entire 15-year run of Monday nights. The place pretty well evoked a high-end brothel with its red velvet and brass decor. A 15-seat bar divided the main casino from the French Quarter. The bar served from both the casino side and the lounge side. When facing the stage you’d go up a couple steps to enter the

lounge; the maître’d’s podium was to the right and the bar on the left. Along the wall to the right were three or four large booths. Alan Grant, his wife Gloria and assorted guests always occupied the first one closest to the casino. To the left was another pair of steps up to booths that ran along the back of the house. These booths would seat six comfortably. There was a row of small cocktail tables in front of the back booths and this type of table filled out the lower main seating area, as well, in two rows. Total seating capacity was about 150 although for special shows they might be able to cram another 25 seats in.

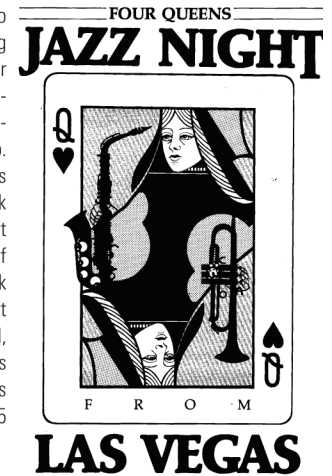
The stage was small. Originally designed for typical Vegas-style lounge entertainers, it was set up on two levels about 12 inches different in height in order to have a built-in riser for the backing instrumentalists working with a singer. The lower part of the semicircular stage thrust into the house several feet and was bounded by a semi-rigid curtain operated electrically from the sound booth or stage. Later, the raised section was removed, which made for a much better working area.

There was a basic stage-light setup with a three-color wash and some key lights. Decorative string lights in plastic tubes bordered the stage and similar miniature accent lights were strung from the artificial plants and ceiling of the room. The effect suggested an outdoor space with pinpoint evening sky starlights overhead.

The din from the casino was often a problem; this is noticeable in some of the recordings we did at the Queens. I used a small applause mic placed high in a fake tree in the middle of the audience. Even though it was aimed away from the dice tables and slot machines just a few dozen feet from the stage sometimes we’d get unwanted sounds from the casino in the mix.

On a busy casino night the slot machines would seldom stop chiming. Today, large banks of slot machines and other devices are pretty quiet because all payouts are in paper credits. Back then, all coin payouts dumped into metal trays. The marketing people loved it because every time someone hit a jackpot, the entire casino could hear it. More than once, a tune would end and just as I was cracking open the applause mic, someone would hit a jackpot and you’d hear an avalanche of coins. Sometimes you’d get a big cheer too, especially around the craps tables because the game can have many simultaneous winners on one throw. The worst was when the performer would finish a tender romantic ballad only to have the casino erupt into a gambling celebration. I learned to have several kinds of casino ambience on hand for post-production, ranging from the sound of a slow night to fourth of July weekend.

The process in the early days was to record the program on reel to reel tape. We only had one tape recorder so we ran the recorder at slow 7.5 ips speed and had to make sure the set was over after just an hour. I’d time the selections, decide which



Courtesy of Four Queens Hotel and Casino

would work to air, cut the tape and generate a music master. Grant would come into the studio to record his introductions and I'd splice in his sections, as well.

We'd ship the tape to the satellite uplink in Denver for network playback at eleven o'clock Thursday mornings. At that time, NPR member stations would set their receivers and recorders to capture the show from the satellite (we called it the "bird") and would play it back according to their local schedule, sometimes later that night or that weekend.

The most significant change in Monday Night at the Four Queens came in 1996, when the hotel decided to turn the French Quarter lounge into a slot area. For the final year of the program the performances took place in an upstairs meeting room, away from the casino noise and general hubbub of the hotel and Fremont Street. For many years, this is what we had been looking and hoping for: a sophisticated place for serious listening and a place that paid respect to the performances.

I think the hotel management really tried to make it work. Sound and lights were installed along with a decent sound booth. Finally I could see, as well as hear, the musicians. The booths were gone, but all the sight lines were excellent and the experience was more like a big city jazz room rather than a lounge surrounded by gamblers and keno runners.

A big problem, though, was that it was difficult to get to the room. A small, slow elevator was the only direct way to get there and the wait could be lengthy. Another problem was that many of the regular patrons were as interested in making the scene as they were about listening to the music. As much as we'd have liked to think the audience was interested in every note from the stage, the reality was that people liked to talk and hang out at the bar. There was never a minimum at the bar. For the first dozen years of Monday Night Jazz it was possible just to stand at the bar and hear great jazz at no cost. Moving upstairs removed most if not all of the social aspect of Monday Night Jazz.

Also, by this time another major casino, The Riviera, began hosting jazz on Monday nights. Their format featured saxophonist Don Menza every week along with special guests and a house rhythm section. This counter-programming split the live jazz audience in Vegas. The Riviera was a much larger casino located on the Strip. At the time it was known mostly for one of the more popular topless show-girl shows in town, Crazy Girls. Audience numbers for our shows began to fall and before long, Monday Night Jazz received notice, eventually to fold in the fall of 1996. The radio show continued for another 26 weeks of repeats while Alan searched for another venue but he came up empty, especially in light of the new competition at the Riviera. (Side note: the Riv's entertainment director at the time was Steve Schirippa who would later go on to portray Bobby Baccalieri on "The Sopranos.")

By March 1997, the radio show, Four Queens Jazz Night from Las Vegas, was through. I drove to Denver to hand-deliver the master tape of the final show and was allowed to push the "start" button on the playback over the satellite. A few weeks later I moved to the university station KUNV where I would stay for nearly four years as program director.



James Gavin on Shirley Horn

From 1982 through 1996, Las Vegas had a hip little oasis for jazz lovers. It was tucked away in the Four Queens Hotel and Casino on Fremont Street, the garish downtown thoroughfare of neon-lit gambling mills, go-go girls, and Elvis-impersonating buskers. Each Monday, the hotel's French Quarter Lounge hosted *Four Queens Jazz Night from Las Vegas*, broadcast on public radio. For traveling musicians — including Phil Woods, Al Cohn, Zoot Sims, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, Joe Pass, and Chet Baker — the series offered an attractive gig in a town that was otherwise almost bereft of jazz.

The fun ended when the Four Queens went bankrupt and was sold. But happily, the tapes survive. This CD marks the release of a sparkling 1988 set by Shirley Horn, the angora-voiced jazz singer and pianist. Horn had spent three decades as a cult artist known mainly in her hometown of Washington, D.C.; now, at 54, she was on a somewhat reluctant road to international fame. Verve Records had recently signed her and released her highest-profile album to date, *I Thought About You: Live from Vine Street*. It introduced thousands of jazz fans to an artist whom Miles Davis had long adored.

Horn's piano chops placed her among the best in her field, but it was her singing that first caught the ear — notably her penchant for confiding ballads at the slowest imaginable tempos. In those floating reveries, Horn looked at love through an impressionistic haze. The feelings were clear, the backstory mysterious. As she explained to Pheralyn Dove of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*: "I'm one of those that believes that less is more. I believe in silence and space. It gives me time to paint the picture." Musicians thought her timing a wonder. "I've never known anyone that could do a ballad that slowly and keep it musical, keep it moving," said pianist Marian McPartland.

The surprise of this live set, however, is its freewheeling abandon. In a no-pressure bar setting, with low-level chit-chat audible throughout, Horn is clearly having a ball. Vocally she lets loose, improvising as she does on no other record. Her playing is at its strongest; ideas pour from her in chorus after chorus. She and her longtime bandmates, bassist Charles Ables and drummer Steve Williams, share a synchronicity to rival almost any jazz trio's.

The seeds of Horn's greatness were there in 1960, when she recorded her first solo album, *Embers and Ashes*, for a tiny and short-lived jazz label, Stere-O-Craft. Then 26, Horn had been studying piano since she was a toddler. "I wanted music with a passion," she recalled. "It was my blood; it was my life." At 12 she entered the Junior School of Music at Howard University, Washington's historic Black college. Her earliest idols were Rachmaninoff and Debussy. But her parents loved jazz, and when she heard Erroll Garner, Horn became more excited about playing what wasn't on the printed page. Other influences took hold: "Oscar Peterson became my Rachmaninoff," she said, "and Ahmad Jamal became my Debussy."

She started singing as a fluke. In her teens, Horn got a job playing classical background piano in a restaurant. A customer asked her to sing "My Melancholy Baby," and Horn complied. The owner heard her, and asked her to keep singing. In 1954, she formed her first jazz trio. Eventually Stere-O-Craft came calling.

"I feel certain that Shirley Horn is going to make it," wrote Manhattan DJ Mort Fega in the liner notes for *Embers and Ashes*. "Stardom," he wrote, was "her inevitable destination." Sure enough, that obscure release won Horn a big-time jazz manager, John Levy, whose clients included Nancy Wilson, Cannonball Adderley and Wes Montgomery. Then came a true shocker. One day, Horn answered the phone and it was Miles Davis. *Embers and Ashes* had reached his hands and he wanted her to open for him at the Village Vanguard. It was Horn's Manhattan debut and she was terrified. But it went well. "He was good to me," she said. "He was fierce. 'You can't smoke them cigarettes!' I was a child. He protected me. He loved me, he loved my music. And he loved my ballads. He'd say, 'They're so slow!' We both felt the same about the use of silence."

Horn's Cinderella rise continued when Levy got her a contract with Mercury Records, where Quincy Jones was a vice-president. Horn was thrilled to be backed by Gerry Mulligan, Al Cohn, Frank Wess and Kenny Burrell, but less pleased with the company's insistence on grooming her as a standup singer. Three stellar pianists — Hank Jones, Jimmy Jones, and Bobby Scott — accompanied her, but as Horn later complained: "Nobody knows how to play for me what I can play for me."

Commercially, it was a moot point. With Beatlemania exploding throughout America, the mid-'60s were no time to launch a subtle jazz singer. Neither the Mercury albums nor a subsequent one for ABC-Paramount caught on. Horn wasn't exactly free to go on the road. She had a husband, mechanic Shep Deering, and a young daughter. "I was torn," she confessed to Richard Harrington of the *Washington Post*. "I came from a very old-fashioned family where a woman's place was in the home." But as Horn hastened to add, she never retired: "Child, I worked every place in this town. I opened and closed all the joints."

By the late '70s her daughter was grown, and Horn ventured out again into the jazz world. SteepleChase, a Danish jazz label, released three Horn CDs, none of them great sellers. Still, the word was spreading. She had developed a solid trio; Steve Williams had joined her in 1983, electric bassist Charles Ables in the early '70s. "I wondered, could I get accustomed to the sound of that instrument? Well, that took me maybe two weeks. Charles gets more upright bass sound than anyone on the scene. I mean, your Milt Hinton, your Ray Browns, all those guys do not get the sound Charles gets."

In 1980, Verve Records producer Richard Seidel, then an executive at Contemporary Records, heard her in Washington and was captivated. By 1986, Seidel had joined Verve, a division of Polygram, and was launching Verve's stock-in-trade: the rediscovery and revitalization of neglected jazz greats. Betty Carter, Abbey Lincoln, and Joe Henderson came aboard later; for now, Seidel had his eye on Horn. He sought her out when she came to New York to work a small club — “a dump,” as she called it. It was a rainy night and attendance was low; the sound system was awful, and her foot hurt. Seidel offered her a deal. “What’s a Polygram?” she snapped.

Horn signed. But major success took a few albums to kick in. Meanwhile, she kept gigging. On May 2, 1988, she played the French Quarter Lounge. The place was far from chic; and for jazz snobs, her choice of “The Boy from Ipanema” might have elicited eye-rolls. But as captured here, Horn’s syncopated vocal phrasing, playful flirtiness, and her elegant but rollicking improvising reveal an artist with a point of view like none other. On two instrumentals, Rodgers and Hart’s “Isn’t It Romantic?” and Randy Weston’s “Hi-Fly,” Horn is on fire. She credited her forceful touch to her female music professor at Howard University, Dr. Hughes. “Oh man, she taught me power. Good lord, she made me play the piano. Wasn’t no pussyfooting or anything like that.” Erroll Garner was clearly the inspiration for Horn’s unshakable left-hand timekeeping and hard swing; with her right hand, she comments wittily and sometimes bluntly on her gossamer vocal lines.

Horn’s balladry is rich with surprises. Her famous silences are filled with suspense; one hangs on her next move. Singing “Lover Man (Oh, Where Can You Be?),” Horn lags as far behind the beat as her first vocal idol, Billie Holiday, but stays as firmly on course as a world-class pilot. At the words “A-huggin’, a-huggin’, a-huggin’ and a-kissin’/Oh, what I’ve been missin’,” she jolts us with a set of stabbing chords — a cry of pain on the keys. Horn had borrowed Ray Charles’s trademark torch song, “Just for a Thrill,” from the acclaimed album *Basin Street East Proudly Presents Miss Peggy Lee*. Horn’s version, like Lee’s, builds slowly; then her bristling chords build up so much tension that the energy explodes in a big crescendo. Horn lets it subside like a cloud of smoke.

Critics hailed her as an oracle of romantic wisdom, which amused her. “I really have not experienced everything that I sing,” she said. “I’ve had a very sheltered life. I’ve been married to the same man for 42 years. Had one child. It’s just that I felt everything that Billie Holiday sang, I felt what Peggy Lee sang; I felt these women’s agonies or whatever. I’m a very emotional person.”



Charles, Bill Clinton, Shirley, Hillary Clinton, Steve

In the early ‘90s Sarah Vaughan died, Carmen McRae retired due to illness and Ella Fitzgerald was in decline. Room had cleared in the top rank of jazz divas. Horn stepped in, thanks once more to Miles Davis. The ailing trumpeter had agreed to play on the title track of Horn’s CD *You Won’t Forget Me*, released in 1991. His much-touted participation helped push it to number one on the *Billboard* jazz chart. The next year, her sumptuous orchestral album *Here’s to Life* topped the same chart for 17 weeks.

After almost 35 years in the shadows, Horn was performing at Carnegie Hall, the White House and all over the world. But she wasn’t so comfortable in the spotlight. She loved making music, but hated giving interviews, and air travel exhausted her. Horn stayed combative with Verve, whose executives pushed her to produce; she spoke openly about wanting to quit the label and scale back to a couple of shows a month. Health problems descended: Horn battled breast cancer and arthritis and also developed diabetes — in part, no doubt, due to her love of Drambuie, the sugary Scotch whiskey liqueur. By 2003 she had lost half of her right leg — which she needed to operate the sustaining pedal — and Charles Ables, who died at 58. Fragile as she was, Horn wasn’t ready to cease performing. She toured with pianist George Mesterhazy, who worked meticulously at replicating her style. Horn sat enthroned center stage like a queen, but sadness hung in the air; without her playing, she felt incomplete.

On October 20, 2005, at 71, Shirley Horn died. Previously, on NPR’s *Jazz Profiles*, she was asked how she wished to be remembered. She answered in her fuzzy caterpillar drawl: “Remember me with love, and remember my music. Try to remember all those pictures I’ve tried to paint. That would please me.” Now comes this CD — one of the brightest portraits in the Horn gallery.

JAMES GAVIN, New York City, 2014

James Gavin’s books include *Deep in a Dream: The Long Night of Chet Baker* and *Stormy Weather: The Life of Lena Horne*.



Charles, Shirley, Steve

An Interview with Producer Richard Seidel

ZEVE FELDMAN: How did you first discover the music of Shirley Horn?

RICHARD SEIDEL: On her 1978 SteepleChase album *A Lazy Afternoon*. I was particularly struck by the ballads, “Why Did I Choose You,” and the title tune. Also she does a killer version of “I’m Old Fashioned” which swings like crazy. Whenever anyone talks about Shirley they talk about how slow she sang her ballads. But she could also swing as hard as any jazz artist and it was her superb piano playing that made that possible. She didn’t do very many up-tempo songs but she *owned* that mid-tempo swing feel she produced on “I’m Old Fashioned” and on songs like “Nice And Easy” which was on her first Verve album. And speaking of her ability to swing hard Shirley told me that when she used to open for Miles at the Village Vanguard in the early ‘60s sometimes she would sit in for Wynton Kelly and play piano on one of the later sets. That would have been something to hear!

How would you describe her sound?

Shirley’s sound to me is clear and direct. Impeccable intonation and diction. And the perfect interaction between piano and voice. Her piano playing orchestrates behind her singing in a way that simulates a much larger sound than just the one keyboard instrument. When we did the *Here’s To Life* album for Verve, which Johnny Mandel arranged, all but two of the arrangements were written by Johnny after Shirley had already recorded the pieces with her trio. Johnny told me that it was difficult for him to figure out what to add given how musically complete what Shirley had already presented with her piano and voice was.

How did you come to sign her for Verve?

I attended a Jazz Times Convention in Washington, D.C. in 1980 when I was working for Contemporary Records. That was back in the day when the big record companies actually had plenty of money to spend on marketing and promotion for jazz. And the Saturday night event was a banquet and performance sponsored by CBS Records Jazz. After the announced performers had done their sets it became a jam session with various musicians sitting in. It must have been after 3:00 AM when Shirley took a seat at the piano. It was my first time hearing her and I was absolutely spellbound. I told myself that I would record this woman someday. And several years later that opportunity presented itself when I was in the process of reactivating Verve as a label for new recordings. I must have been really



determined to record her because when I saw her in New York in the mid-'80s at a short-lived Greenwich Village Club called Carlos 1, I was the only person in the room for the second set and I still decided to sign her. Fortunately that situation [low attendance at her shows] changed after we started having success with her records at Verve and she began selling out jazz clubs around the world and filling some concert halls, as well.

Do you have a favorite album?

My favorites and the ones that I feel are the pinnacle of Shirley's art are *You Won't Forget Me* from 1990 and *Here's To Life* from 1991. *You Won't Forget Me* is Shirley in her traditional trio context but with various twists. Sometimes it's her regular working trio of Charles Ables on bass and Steve Williams on drums. And sometimes it's Buster Williams and Billy Hart, who had also backed her on the *A Lazy Afternoon* album. And then there are the special guests soloists which included Toots Thielemans, Miles Davis, Wynton Marsalis and Branford Marsalis. Shirley was really focused for these sessions. I think she sensed something big was about to happen for her and she gave her all.

Most of the material was planned in advance but she just spontaneously decided to do her medley of "The Music That Makes Me Dance" and "Come Dance With Me." It turned out so well that we decided to open the album with it. And then there's the title track with Miles, which although uncredited, drummer Steve Williams came up with the arrangement for, in as he described it, a kind of "Filles De Kilimanjaro" feel. It ended up being one of Miles's very last times in the studio and the pairing of his Harmon-muted trumpet and Shirley's intimate vocal artistry transports you back to what either one of them sounded like when they shared those nights at the Vanguard.

Here's To Life I believe is probably both the best-known and the favorite album of many Shirley Horn fans, and of many more jazz vocal fans in general. Having Johnny Mandel arrange the strings was a dream come true for Shirley and she totally rose to the occasion with some of her greatest singing. Unlike the rest of the album on two of the songs — the title tune and "Where Do You Start" — Johnny wrote the arrangements from scratch and then Shirley came into the studio and sang live with the orchestra. To me, this allowed Johnny the fullest possible creative range and you can hear it in his wondrous writing on those two pieces.

One of the highlights of the album is that Shirley recorded three of Johnny Mandel's tunes — "Where Do You Start", "A Time For Love" and the much less well-known but haunting "Quietly There." The rest of the repertoire was quite wide-ranging from songs of French origin — "If You Love Me" and Italian via Brazilian origin — "Estate" which Joao Gilberto had already made known — to Gershwin and Rodgers and Hart classics. Shirley loved to watch old movies on TV late at night and she told me that's where she discovered Dimitri Tiomkin's "Return To Paradise." Incidentally Shirley was going to ask Miles to guest on this record, as well, but he was not well and actually passed during the making of the album. So she asked Wynton Marsalis to play on two songs.

What was the process like of working with Shirley on a recording project?

It was a slow process getting going, especially in terms of choosing repertoire. I always had to laugh because whenever I would ask Shirley to tell me what tunes she wanted to do and she was at home, her list was always upstairs when she

was downstairs or vice versa. But Shirley usually had a pretty good idea of what she wanted and ultimately had strong feelings about every aspect of each project. She was a creature of habit in that she always wanted to record with her own trio, in the same room of the exact studio — Clinton Recording in New York — and with the same engineer — David Baker. That was her comfort zone. It enabled her to settle in and get focused. Sometimes she had trouble with lyrics — and she would sing them incorrectly even when we wrote them out for her in two-inch high letters — but musically she was almost always there.

Can you talk about a fond memory of her?

Here are a couple of favorite Shirley anecdotes:

Once when Shirley was playing the Newport Jazz Festival it was cold and drizzly for her set. She proceeded to put on white gloves to play the piano and she did not perform a single ballad, which, of course, was highly unusual for her. After the set I asked her how come she played all medium and up-tempo songs and wore the gloves. She said, "Richard, I was freezing my ass off!"

And one more from a different festival. When Shirley played Monterey for the first time she was on the opening night Friday show. Having been there before I knew that the 5,000 or so people in the arena tended to get loose and loud that first evening. I warned her about and told her she'd have to work extra hard to keep their attention. So what did she do? She pulled out Leon Russell's "A Song For You," an arena tune if there ever was one. And she nailed it. And the audience was hers.

What do you think of this new recording?

This record is very much in the vein of Shirley's first album on Verve and is an excellent example of her work in an intimate club atmosphere. In fact they were recorded around the same time and both contain swinging instrumental versions of "Isn't It Romantic."

What would you say to Shirley if you could right now?

Thank you for bringing your music into my life and for everything it did to help me be successful in my work. And for reminding me as much as any musician other than Miles that "less is more."



Richard Seidel and Shirley

An Interview with Producer Jean-Philippe Allard

ZEV FELDMAN: I've always associated you closely with Shirley Horn and with her music. I'm speaking with two producers: you and Richard Seidel. I wanted reflections by people who worked with her and who were close to her. I wanted to get your opinion, I wanted to talk to you about her, just to get your words. I'm interested to hear what you have to say.

JEAN-PHILIPPE ALLARD: It was Richard Seidel who was really the main producer. I did not work a lot with her as a producer compared to somebody like Richard. When I produced the Toots Thielemans album *For My Lady*, we had her as a pianist because Toots thought she was one of the best pianists on the scene. So, I had a chance to produce her on that. And I worked with her on a live recording in Paris, *I Love You, Paris*. This was an unbelievable recording. And I also co-produced with Richard the album *Loving You*, the one in L.A. that we recorded at The Roosevelt Hotel. I also worked with her for the recording of *The Art of the Song*, the Charlie Haden album featuring Shirley and Bill Henderson.

I wanted to talk to you because from speaking to Shirley's daughter, Rainy, I understood that Shirley respected you very much. If I may ask, what do you think made her special? What was it about her, in terms of being an artist, a vocalist. What is it about her that stood out to you?

She was a genius and you know, I don't call a lot of people a genius. I think she was a real genius . . . a musical genius. The way she approached a song as a singer and as a pianist — 'cause it works together — is just unbelievable. The way she accompanied herself is so great that at the end of her life, when she was not playing anymore piano, it changed a lot — it changed the groove, it changed the harmony, it changed the voicings. Even if she was performing with a great pianist, it was not the same. She had a way to play behind herself, that was for me, pure genius: the harmonies, the voicings she was using at the right time, and the dynamic of her voice and the piano, it was perfect. She could take a song and as a singer, she was going deeply into the lyrics. She was really an interpreter in the tradition of Billie Holiday. She was telling the story. She was taking the time to tell the story. She was *really* playing profoundly the song, and she was maintaining these slow grooves and playing these very sophisticated chords. It was truly unique. That's why I call it genius. I don't have another word for that.

The way she would phrase . . .

Yes, yes . . . phrasing. She was really a singer and a pianist. They go together. This is where she becomes pure genius. You cannot be better than that. She takes you, she grabs you and turns you on to the songs and whispers the song in your ear. It's absolutely beautiful. It's the way she plays, that makes it very special.

How did you begin working together?

I guess I was working at the time, the late '80s, for Polygram Jazz in Paris and she was releasing her first album on Verve, the one on Vine Street. She was rediscovered. She was very obscure before; kind of forgotten at that time. The first time I heard her live was when my friend and then-colleague, Seth Rothstein, took me to the Village Vanguard where she was performing. There were maybe 20 or 30

people in the club. It was before the big comeback, just before. She was like a Sphinx hypnotizing the audience. She was really fascinating. I met her after the show. She was nice, moving slow and speaking low.

I've seen her in that room. It's amazing, because when I saw her, she always had this ability to transform the mood in the room, the space and what was going on. Do you feel that way?

Everybody felt it, I believe. It was her magic. Very slow tempos, even if also she could swing hard and play funky. Beautiful soft voice with a perfect control of her dynamics and great stories. It's exactly the same kind of energy if it was very fast, but it's the reverse. And it's a powerful energy. She was a master of that. She certainly was the only one to do that. Ray Charles came close to that sometimes. He was doing it sometimes, but she was doing it *all* the time. It was also something that she could handle because of her great rhythm section: Charles Ables on bass and Steve Williams on drums. They played so long with her that they could breathe like her. They could play these slow grooves. You could think that it was rubato but there was an inner rhythm that made it swing in a way. It was a telepathic thing she had with Steve and Charles. A Shirley Horn Trio show was like an elegant and mysterious ceremony. They were changing the space and the time during their performance.

She had this thing about space. The space between, like you said, there's that groove going on, but it carries. I don't know anybody else who does that.

No, there's nobody. I was working with her on a live recording in Paris. At first, she asked me, "What do you want me to do?" I said, "Do what you feel, just do what you feel." She was always frustrated because she felt that she never been able to play enough slow songs in her recordings. That night at the Theatre du Châtelet, she played a very . . . an unusually long sequence of ballads, all at very slow tempos. It was a lesson of how time and space can serve a song. And that was really amazing, with all that space between every phrase. She took the 2000 people attending the show into her own world of emotion. She stopped the time and everybody was so quiet and focused. It was unbelievably impressive.

Could you talk a little bit about what it was like, the process of making a record together?

As I mentioned before, I did not work on a lot of her recordings. Beside the live one in Paris, I worked together with Richard Seidel on *Loving You*. She was unpredictable, very funny and not really listening to what we had to tell her. I also remember the session with Charlie Haden.

Yeah, Charlie Haden. That was a great album.

The album called *The Art of the Song*. She does "A Lonely Town" it's absolutely fantastic. She sings a few songs on this one with Alan Broadbent string arrangements and the Charlie Haden's Quartet West. Because she was signed to Verve in the U.S. and I was working for Universal/Verve France, she was not really in my office. But we managed to work together. I got along well with her. I loved her. She was fun. She was the princess of humor and the music was always great. Thinking of the way we were working on the albums . . . we were starting with the songs; choosing the songs was the most important. She was very easy in the studio. Just quietly working.

You mentioned before, how she had been a relatively obscure artist, but



that in France, in particular, she developed quite a strong following. A lot of people really like her very much here. What would you attribute the large following to?

In France she was even almost not a rediscovery, she was a *discovery* at the time. It was not even a comeback, it was just an epiphany, I would say. It was like, here she is! We believed in her. We worked hard on her promotion and the album with Wynton and Miles made the difference. It started it and, at the time, she was coming here playing clubs. It was the beginning of her love story with France and Paris. Then we recorded in Paris. And she called it "I Love You, Paris." So when you say that to French people that you love them, they'll love you.

Oh, and I forgot one thing. There were one great piece in *Libération*, a big article from a guy called Louis Skorecki. He was a film critic, he was not a music critic, right? At the time *Libération* was very important; it's still important, but at the time much more important than it is now. It was bigger, it was like *The Village Voice* when it [*Libération*] was big. And he called the article, "The Best Kept Secret of Jazz." He told the story of Shirley — she was this great, fantastic singer, but only a few people knew about her. This article changed everything for her in France and after that it started to snowball.

I think it's wonderful, though, that she was able to build up such a following here. No surprise, obviously, in many ways, since France has championed so many wonderful artists.

In the '90s, the festivals were huge in France — there were so many big jazz festivals, she could work. We also had nice clubs and she loved playing clubs. She was not the best to do promotion with because she would be working until two or three in the morning and did not like the daylight. It was not always easy.

Do you have any specific or memorable experiences about Shirley? Was there something very interesting that stood out — a particular experience with her?

I can think of a story I can tell . . . lots I cannot tell. She was eccentric, right? Uh . . . I think you can call it eccentric — this is what it was. She liked certain places . . . she did not like to change anything. If she liked a hotel, she would always wanted to always stay in the same hotel. Same with musicians. She didn't like changes. There were a couple of restaurants she liked in Paris — one was *Restaurant au Chien Qui Fume*. It means "Dog Who Smokes." And another one was *Léon de*

Bruxelles where you eat mussels and french fries. In restaurants, she was stealing the menus and any stuff she could bring back like match boxes . . . things like that. I remember she took the *Chez Leon de Bruxelles* menu which was in a shape of a huge mussel. It's not the kind of thing you want to bring home. But she wanted it.

Souvenirs!

The last time I saw her play it was in Paris at the *Cité De La Musique*. She was not playing piano anymore.

George Mesterhazy was playing?

Yeah . . . and she did something that really touched me a lot. She knew I really missed her playing because as I said, for me her playing goes together with her singing. At the time I had some terrible family problem, so she thought I was not in the audience. She didn't know I was attending the show . . . It happened that I wanted to go to see her anyway, but she didn't know. At the end of the concert, for an encore, she decided to play the piano. She stayed just by herself and she did "This Hotel." I loved this song from her Miles Davis Tribute album and she knew it. And she dedicated the song to me with very nice words. She didn't know I was there. It was deep. And after that I went backstage to see her and she said, "Oh, I didn't know!" I just said, "Thank you." It was really touching. Because she didn't do it to please me, she did it because she meant it. It was something that . . . this is how special she was, 'cause she knew I was going through hell at the time.

What would you say . . . do you have a proud moment from working with her together? Was there an accomplishment, something that you did together to this day that you still think about?

The Toots Thielemans album, *For My Lady*, when she sings "Someone to Watch Over Me." The *I Love You, Paris* album. Those are great moments for me and I am really proud I was part of it. I think the music was as good could as it could be. She was in the Miles Davis, Lester Young, Sonny Rollins league. But the fact she was a woman in a man's world and also because singers are not always taken seriously, she does not have the recognition she deserves.

Okay, I have one last thing. This is maybe sentimental, maybe foolish, but what would you say to her if she was here right now, if you had a chance to talk with her, what would you say to her?

Let's get a drink!

Heineken with Drambuie on the side?

Heineken with Drambuie on the side with a lot of ice! Yeah . . . and a smoke. A Pall Mall.

Thank you.

Now I don't know if that's something to say. It's just good for me to talk about people like her. I mean, I can go on and on. When they had the funeral, I was in Paris and Steve Williams was in Paris too. Steve loves food and Shirley loved cooking — so we decided, as a tribute to Shirley, to have a dinner at my house. Steve came with his girlfriend and my wife cooked. At the same time, there was a funeral in Washington and we were calling people there so we knew what was happening. We only told stories about Shirley, and we were very sad, so we were crying and laughing also because most of the stories were very funny. She was living in her own little world.



Charles Ables

Zev Feldman and Jean-Philippe Allard Remember Bassist Charles Ables

ZEV FELDMAN: Shirley had a tight group around her. The guys in her band and close friends. But Charles Ables was always quiet when I was around. He didn't always hang with us. After the show, Shirley would hang, Steve would hang, [manager] Sheila [Mathis] would hang. But Charles kind of would go off sometimes and would leave the group.

JEAN-PHILIPPE ALLARD: I don't think he was communicating with the world, he would only communicate with Shirley. He was not talking to anybody.

What about the big glasses, without the lenses in them, right?

He was doing things like that, you know? But for Shirley, he was important. He was her homeboy from D.C.; she was playing with a neighbor, so she felt comfortable with him. And it worked. I don't think he would be able to be with another band at the time, but he worked very well with her. He always looked like he didn't know the song, like he was watching her hands. Nothing was really normal in this band! And when he died, it was very hard for her too. Again, to play her stuff, it was not easy. She played with great and famous musicians, but what she could get with Charles and Steve was really unique. It was because of years and years of playing, touring, traveling, eating together and doing everything very slowly.

Playing with Shirley

by **STEVE WILLIAMS** as told to **LARRY APPLEBAUM**

Before I met Shirley Horn Deering, (Deering was her married name), we used to see her at the One Step Down jazz club on Sundays. I thought then, "What a swinging pianist." Then, when she sang, I simply thought, "Umm... double treat!"

Later I was working with the singer Jamie Broumas and Shirley walked in with her beloved friend, Joe Brawner. We were introduced that night, but she didn't say much. I thought, "Oh well, I'm happy to see her in this environment."

A few months later I, did a concert with Joe Williams at the Smithsonian. Shirley came backstage and she said a few words to me, most of which I don't remember precisely. But I do remember the sentence, "I would like you to come to my house and play." Before that, her drummer, Warren Shadd, called me to sub for him at the One Step Down. She floated in on what seemed like a cloud and we began to play. All I could do was put my stick on the cymbal.

The next week, she called and asked me to come to her house for a rehearsal. The first thing she asked me was, "Do you know the Poinciana beat?" I said I did even though I didn't; I faked it. Then she pushed me off the drum set and played exactly what Vernel Fournier played with Ahmad Jamal. I felt like a beginner, student, a rookie. I then began really to study drummers and how they played. Billy Hart was the first one I concentrated on. He's from D.C. and he played with Shirley, so it was natural.

Because Shirley didn't use charts, I learned everything on the bandstand. We rarely rehearsed. She said it ruined the spontaneity, the mystery she so longed for. Shirley was an in-the-moment artist to the highest degree. What she did carry was around a half dozen spiral notebooks in which she'd written lyrics and key signatures. Not having music in front of her enabled her to use space to create drama, change keys and elongate the ballad pulse. And nobody did it like Shirley.

The challenge was for me to find something to play during ballads without the hi-hat (the sock cymbal). Shirley just wanted constant sound; I just waited for beat one. What a satisfying feeling! Because Warren was Shirley's drummer before me, he understood this concept and had it down. He could play legato very well; not many notes per chord, but with a great pulse.

One of the interesting things about musicians who stay in their home town is that they get a chance to create their own sound and they use the musicians around them to help do that. Buck Hill was one her favorites, she adored him and he knew her sound and complemented it much. She also loved pianist Reuben Brown and said many time, "if I ever need an accompanist, it would be Reuben." I met so many musicians from D.C. at her house and some not from D.C.; some older, some not.

You never knew who you would meet at Shirley's house. I will never forget coming to there and sitting in the kitchen with John Malachi and Sarah Vaughn. Once before a record date, Carmen McCrae was there when I came in. They went to the piano and magic happened. Then the phone rang, Shirley said, "Chile, pick that up," (chile being short for child). I picked it up and I said, "Shirley, it's some guy trying to sound like Miles," she said, "Hand me the phone." Then I heard, "Oh, that's my drummer. He didn't recognize your voice." Two weeks later we were in the studio with Miles Davis recording "You Won't Forget Me." And I won't!

I can say, especially listening to this early recording I did with her, that besides sounding like a kid getting schooled, I only hear this planetary energy of melody, comforting harmony, lyric, rhythm and SWING. Shirley really belongs to that elite group of musicians where just one note swings and has her stamp on it. What a great honor to have these recordings throughout my 27-ish years to reflect on. I guess it will take at least another 27 years to digest them. I wish every artist had the opportunity I did. It's priceless. Shirley is my soulmate for life and I thank her for what she gave me and the world.



Steve, Shirley and Charles with Horace Silver

Sheila Jordan Talks with Ted Panken About Her Friend Shirley Horn

SHEILA JORDAN: The first time I heard about Shirley Horn was after [Shirley Horn's producer-manager] Joel Siegel, who was a good friend of mine, told me I had to hear and meet Shirley, whom I'd never heard about. He loved singers, and he was very particular about them. They both lived in Washington, D.C. Joel put on these concerts, and I did one for him at the One Step Down Club. Shirley came in with a beautiful bouquet of flowers, and we talked. I don't recall if that's the first time I met her, but I specifically remember her coming into the One Step Down.

TED PANKEN: Would that have been in the '80s, do you think?

I would say in the '80s. I'd already heard her records on SteepleChase.

Do you have any memories of that first conversation, what sparked your connection?

Shirley found out a lot about my life and history through Joel, and she wanted to be a friend. I think she knew what I had gone through, and she was very nourishing. I would go and see her when I could, either at the Vanguard or the Village Gate — one of those places. Afterwards, we would go have something to eat, and then we'd talk.

She was always telling me to come by and visit when I went to D.C., and one time, when I was working at Blues Alley, I either went a day early or stayed a little after so I could. She made an incredible dinner. She made greens and chicken, because she knew I didn't eat beef.



Steve Williams

She made me a little black jacket one time, after Joel asked her to. And she gave me the most beautiful vase with flowers in it when I was at One Step Down. I still have that beautiful vase, and I call it Shirley.

When Shirley passed, I was working at the Blue Note in Milano. I was at the piano player's house, and he said, "I have something I think I should tell you. I don't want you to find it out some other way." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Shirley Horn died." I said, "Oh my God. Are you serious?" He said, "Yes, I am." When Shirley was sick and in the hospital, I was going to visit her, and she told me not to come. She said she didn't want me to see her like that. So I didn't go. Sometimes I'm sorry that I listened to her, that I should have gone regardless; even if I didn't get in the room to see her, I'd be there. But I respected her wishes.

Anyway, getting back to the Blue Note in Milan, that night at the concert somebody gave me a beautiful bouquet of flowers before I started, and I put them right beside me on a little stool. I told everybody that I was dedicating my concert to Shirley's memory. After every tune, I turned to the vase of flowers and said, "Was that OK, Shirley? Did you like that?" I sent one or two dozen red roses to her funeral, and Sheila Mathis put them on top of the casket.

Did you listen to a lot of her records after you met her?

A lot of the time, especially when I was teaching singers in workshops. I always played Shirley, and still do.

Did you hear her live a lot?

I heard her live several times. I sang with her at a thing at Fat Tuesdays where it was Helen Merrill, Shirley Horn and me. I was with Harvie S at the time. To sing a ballad with Shirley Horn was like paradise. Every time I attended her gig, she would invite me to sit in and do a tune or two. The way she laid out chords for me, the way she accompanied, was one of the thrills of my life.

Do you recall some of the tunes?

I think one was "It Never Entered My Mind." I also remember that I sang "The Thrill Is Gone" with her. I remember those two ballads specifically. She knew all these tunes.

You said that singing with her was paradise.

Yes, it was. What she was playing was so close to what I was feeling emotionally and hearing that I actually left my body, like I was floating over the two of us. It was what they call an out-of-body experience. I've had about three or four, and one of them was when I sang with Shirley Horn. She was playing piano for me. She did not sing.

Could you talk about some of the qualities of her voice and approach that made her such a special singer?

First of all, she sounded like Shirley Horn. I didn't hear any other influences in her singing. She was such a dynamite piano player, and her voice complemented her piano playing. They were so special, it was like one sound. She sang so honestly and truthfully, and it was so heartfelt that you were sucked into it.

Can you say a little more about her tempos?

I thought I sang ballads slow until I heard her! She put me to shame. She would play a ballad, and I'd close my eyes, and it was like heaven. I could have any feeling I'd want between each note — or each phrase, I should say. Then there's a lull, and then it would go somewhere else. It was this beautiful feeling of going where she took me, with all that space and the beautiful way she sang and conveyed a lyric.

Are there any singers that you'd compare her to?

No.

Are there any singers who you hear references to?

Oh yeah, a lot of them. But they're not Shirley, and they never will be. No. That's Shirley Horn. When she sang, she sang about her life and what she was about. It was all about her. I never heard influences of any singers in Shirley Horn either. Shirley was her own person. When I'm teaching I always tell singers that they should listen to Shirley to be inspired, but do not copy her, because you will never, ever be able to sing that song the way she sings it. Unless you can do something different and really make it your own, leave it alone. Some of them want to sound like her because they love her so much. I don't believe in that. Sing your own story. Don't sing somebody else's. That's treading on property that doesn't belong to you. I'm not saying don't sing the same song, but sing it your way. Get your own thing going. Don't copy somebody else's. A lot of singers don't know about her, which is surprising. But if they're really into the music, they will know who Shirley Horn is.

Oh, this is a story. One of the last concerts she did was a tribute concert to her in D.C. They brought me and Kevin Mahogany and Lizz Wright, and Kenny Barron was there, Regina Carter ... a lot of different musicians. We all did our little thing, and they showed a film on her. She wanted me to sing "The Very Thought Of You," but she wanted me to do a little Native American improv in front, because she loved when I did that. After they showed the film, she wanted to play the piano. She was in a wheelchair. Somebody said, "Oh, she'll never make it." I said, "Yes, she will; you bet your ass she'll make it." She went over to the piano, and slid off onto the bench, and accompanied herself singing "Here's To Life." I'm getting

chills from saying that. It was so beautiful that I was speechless and crying. That's the last time I heard her sing — "Here's To Life."

From reading this interview, she sounds like an extraordinarily intelligent and intuitive woman; maybe a genius.

Yes, I considered Shirley a genius. I think I told her that one time, and she laughed, and said, "Get out of here!"

In an interview that Katea Stitt conducted with her after she received the NEA Jazz Master Award, Shirley Horn referred to you. She said to Ms. Stitt: "Where do you put me? Where do I belong? I'm not hardcore jazz. I don't consider myself a jazz singer. I just like to be referred to as a good singer who picks nice material. Well, who is a jazz singer? There's Betty Carter and there's Sheila Jordan." Do you have any views on what kind of singer she was, if we can refer to categories?

She was a unique singer. To me she was a jazz singer, because she sang from her heart, which is what a jazz singer is to me. They're not primed to be, "OK, do this, do this." Nobody tells them how to sing. They don't put on any airs. They just sing their feelings, their deep-rooted feelings, whether it's about them or someone else. But it's something very close to them that they feel so deeply. She felt so deeply everything she sang.

So it's not scatting. It's not vocalese. It's the heart.

You don't have to scat. The only reason I scat-sing is because I listened to Charlie Parker as opposed to other singers growing up. But in today's jazz world some of the instrumentalists tell singers they aren't jazz singers if they don't scat. I tell the singers to ask the instrumentalists if they thought Billie Holiday was a jazz singer. Of course they have to say yes. Then I tell them to say, "Well she never scat sang."

You touched a bit on her piano playing. Can you speak a bit on the relationship of her piano playing to her singing?

When Shirley sang and played, it was like one voice. Her singing and piano playing were equal. Her way of playing piano was unique; I've never heard anything like it. It had nothing to do with, like, a Bud Powell all over the keyboard. She caressed the piano when she played. When she accompanied you singing or playing a horn, she gave you so much freedom. I have to tell piano players who I work with, "don't play too much; play for me the way you would play for a horn player." Shirley instinctively knew that. She knew that because that's how she played for Shirley Horn! If you sang with her, she played the same way she plays for Shirley Horn, with all this freedom. It's incredible. I've never experienced it again.

What are your thoughts about the CD?

Oh my God. It was like she was with me. It was fantastic. You don't need to say any more than just the way she sings one chorus of "Lover Man." I felt like she was still with us, and I was in this club, it didn't matter where it was, and she was singing and I was there. I never heard her play so many choruses as on "Isn't It Romantic," as many times as I heard her in person. She was so into it! Shirley had exquisite taste, and she always knew just how much to do, and when to and when not to. (It's weird — I'm talking about her, and I have a picture of her and me on the wall over here in my bedroom.) She's right on the money. Sometimes her singing is so exquisite you forget what a fantastic piano player she is. It comes through

even more on “Isn’t It Romantic.” Each chorus escalated, and became a highlight. But the whole CD is incredible. It’s really important.

Could you give brief impressions of each track?

I don’t know the tune [“Something Happens To Me”], or whose tune it is. I was very impressed. It was a real treat to hear a tune that I didn’t know. She made it her own.

“Boy From Ipanema.” Shirley sings these Brazilian tunes the way they should be sung. Very to the point, not over-the-top, and just states the beautiful melody and the beautiful lyrics. How she accompanied herself was fantastic.

There’s an instrumental of “Hi-Fly.”

Oh, I love that. I didn’t know whether she was going to sing it or not, because it does have good lyrics by Jon Hendricks. What I love about this whole CD is that it also shows off her fantastic piano playing. She was wailin’ on “Hi-Fly.” It was a good-sounding piano, and she sounded comfortable with it. If a piano isn’t up to par, that can have a lot to do with how a great artist like Shirley Horn would perform, whether she would be on top of it.

You already mentioned “Lover Man.” Anything else to say about the performance?

This is not a Billie Holiday comparison, and I don’t know how to say this without it sounding weird, but it was like a new version of a Billie Holiday classic. The way Shirley sang it, I believed every word. I really believed that she was singing about finding a lover. Where can you be? Where are you? I know she was married and all that stuff, but I don’t know. I just got the feeling that she knew exactly how it felt not to have a lover in her life. Now, maybe that was before she found her husband.

“You’d Be So Nice To Come Home To.”

Again, I like the way she intertwines her playing with her singing. She improvised on the second chorus, but just altered notes here and there, with such great taste. When I listened to her sing it, she was swinging. And I was hearing the song in my head, and I would go one place which I thought she was going to go, and dammit, she’d fool me, and go somewhere else. I said, “Oh, you went there, did you? You devil, you fooled me.” After hearing every song on this recording, I was talking to her. I said, “Oh, don’t make me feel like that. Now you’re going to make me cry — stop it.”

I played “Isn’t It Romantic” in the car, and I had to pull over to the side because the playing was so outstanding. It was swinging so hard. She had such incredible taste in knowing when not to sing. A lot of singers have to sing 50 million choruses, every tune. Everyone who wants to be a jazz singer should hear the simplicity of the way she sang.

“Meditation.”

That’s another one of those beautiful bossa novas. Jobim. Shirley on that occasion almost speaks the words. It’s almost like she’s talking to me. When she was singing, I said, “You know what? You’ve got me meditating. I’m meditating with your beautiful singing and your beautiful accompanying.” Then she takes these beautiful solos. On this one, I thought she was going to come back in one place, and she fooled me and came back in another place. I said to her, “Oh, you fooled me again, didn’t you?”

“Just For A Thrill.” What can you say? I know the tune, though I don’t do it. I never thought much of that song as a tune. I never found it challenging enough in the melody, not because it was simple, but just something about it. But when I heard her sing it on this recording, I fell in love with this tune. Again, I believed every word she sang. It’s like she’s speaking to me. I still don’t think I want to do it. But I told her, “Boy, you really changed my opinion on this tune.”

The set-closer is a blues.

A wonderful closer. Shirley could play the blues!

I think the only recording on which she played for another singer was a Carmen McRae recording in 1990.

Carmen didn’t move me the way Shirley does, although I think Carmen was a great musician and a great artist. My singers are Billie Holiday, and then of course Sarah Vaughan for her magnificent voice. Ella Fitzgerald—nobody scats like that. And Shirley. I think I asked Shirley one time about scatting. She wasn’t comfortable scatting. But she does a little bit of it on here.

A complete discography of hers online shows that she recorded maybe 200 different songs. She expressed a very strongly articulated point of view on each one of them. What would you speculate was her process on assimilating the message of a lyric?

I think one time we talked about tunes and lyrics. I told her that a tune to me is always hearing the melody first. If the lyrics don’t move me, I can change them, but it’s the melody that captures my heart first. I think Shirley was very careful of the songs she selected to sing and play. I’m sure they had to be wonderful melodies, and I’m sure the lyrics had to touch her heart. I think it had a lot to do with the lyrics. I never heard Shirley do a corny tune.

There’s a story that Sarah Vaughan was such a strong piano player that once, when she was on tour with Nat Cole, he got sick and couldn’t make the show, so she played his set, including the piano parts. Carmen McRae was a good piano player as well.



Sheila Jordan and Shirley

Sarah to Shirley Horn for piano playing. I’m sure they were good. I heard them play a little bit here and there, and it was OK. But I preferred them just stand-up singing. Not Shirley Horn. Shirley Horn could make it on her own as a fantastic improviser on the piano. She was a great piano player. That’s how I feel. A lot of piano players are going to be shocked when they hear “Isn’t It Romantic.” They’ll say, “Oh my God! Yeah, I guess so.”

November 30, 2014

Shirley Horn’s Washington by Rusty Hassan

Shirley Horn was my friend and neighbor. In 1972 my wife Sandy and I purchased a home on the edge of Brookland in Northeast Washington, D.C. around the same time Shirley, her husband Shep Deering and their daughter moved into their home a few blocks away on Lawrence Street. Shirley had had her brush with fame, *Embers and Ashes*, opening for Miles Davis at the Village Vanguard, the Mercury recordings produced by Quincy Jones and the soundtrack of *For The Love of Ivy*. She was now content to settle into her home, continue to raise her daughter Rainy and perform locally. As a jazz programmer on WAMU at that time, I was, of course, familiar with her music but it was through my wife’s parents that I became part of a circle of older musicians who were among Shirley’s closest friends who opted, like her, to stay in D.C.

John Malachi, my father-in-law’s closest friend from pre-World War II days, was the pianist in the Billy Eckstine orchestra of the mid ‘40s that featured Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Gene Ammons, Dexter Gordon, Art Blakey and other luminaries of the bebop era. After touring with Sarah Vaughan in the 1950s he decided that staying Washington to raise his family was a better option than life on the road. Buck Hill, the phenomenal tenor saxophonist, made the same decision and even got a day gig with the Postal Service, where he became known as the “Wailin’ Mailman.” Bill Harris toured with the Clovers before recording the first solo jazz guitar album for the Mercury label in the mid ‘50s. He opened a guitar studio in order to be able to get off the road and be at home in D.C.

In the 1970s, Brookland (and environs) was an integrated but predominantly Black middle-class neighborhood. Sterling Brown, a poet and retired Howard University professor, lived on Quincy Street. Andrew White, a multi-instrumentalist and Coltrane scholar whose transcriptions are sought after by saxophonists worldwide, lived on South Dakota Avenue on the edge of Brookland. He still conducts his mail-order business from the house and performs occasionally in Washington. Bill Harris lived on Hamlin Street in a house that overlooked Langdon Park where there is now a memorial dedicated to D.C. go-go legend Chuck Brown.

Every Labor Day, Bill Harris would have a party in his back yard featuring prominent guitarists. Kenny Burrell performed there, as did the Jamaican Ernest Ranglin. Shirley would drop by to hang out with her friends. She was especially close to Bill’s wife Fannie. It was Bill’s dream to move these performances into a club. When space became available at 18th and Rhode Island Ave. NE, right in the neighborhood, he jumped at it. He named the club after a Bessie Smith song, “Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer.”

Pigfoot was one of three Black-owned clubs in the neighborhood that were centers of jazz activity rivaling such downtown clubs as Harold’s Rogue And Jar and The One Step Down. Mr. Y’s and Moore’s Love and Peace were a few blocks down Rhode Island Avenue, across from each other at Franklin. Shirley and Shep could frequently be found in the audience in any of these clubs. Shirley especially enjoyed John Malachi at Pigfoot and would occasionally perform there herself.

Billy Hart who had grown up in the neighborhood would often return home from New York to visit his mother and hang out at Pigfoot. By now his career was well established; by then he’d worked with Jimmy Smith, Wes Montgomery,

McCoy Tyner, Miles Davis and Stan Getz. He wanted to see that those who got his career started in Washington got the international recognition they deserved. He arranged for recording dates in 1978 with the Danish SteepleChase label for Buck Hill and Shirley Horn and performed on the sessions for both artists. He also paved the way for them to perform at the North Sea Jazz Festival in 1981. The three albums Shirley recorded for SteepleChase were not big sellers but did help to reestablish her career outside of D.C.

Another person who helped to jump-start Shirley's career in the 1980s was Joel Siegel — not the TV personality, but a unique Washington character. He was a film professor at Georgetown University, music critic for Washington City Paper, lyricist, Grammy award co-winner for liner notes for the Verve Billie Holiday collection and, for a while, Shirley Horn's manager. His music criticism in the paper could be severe if a performance or recording didn't live up to his high standards. A delightfully witty gossip, he would have you in stitches during a conversation at a party but you would always be wondering what he had to say about you in your absence. Siegel presented Shirley at an important concert at the Corcoran Gallery of Art and got her booked in venues beyond the local clubs. I'm sure it was no accident that Richard Seidel caught her in performance in D.C. and again in New York and persuaded her to sign with Polygram. I'm also sure that Joe's and Shirley's clashing personalities resulted in some heated discussions about her career that were frustrating for both of them. In the late '90s he championed Rene Marie who told me his advice was invaluable.



Charles and Shirley

Charles Ables became Shirley Horn's bassist in 1973. It seemed to be an anomaly for her to have an electric bassist but she liked what he did with it for the sound of her trio. Her drummer in the '70s through the early '80s was her nephew (her sister's son), Warren Shadd. But Shadd had other ambitions. Sometime in 1983 before a gig at the One Step Down

he contacted Steve Williams to fill in for him. Steve became her drummer for the rest of her life. Warren pursued his other ambition and is the manufacturer of the Shadd concert grand piano.

Charles Ables and Steve Williams accompanied Shirley on the initial Verve recording, a live session from the Vine Street Bar and Grill in Hollywood. She brought in her old friend Buck Hill to perform with her trio on the second date for the label. She had a tremendous loyalty to her D.C. colleagues, making sure they had the opportunity to be on the session where Miles Davis was the guest artist. Her bassist and drummer are even included in the large ensemble conducted by Johnny Mandel on *Here's To Life*.

Shirley's Verve recordings topped the Billboard jazz charts. Shirley appeared on the cover of *Jazz Times* in September 1992, that issue featuring a profile of her by Chip Defaa. Shirley's trio embarked on world tours performing before audiences of thousands. But as her fame grew along with the performance fees she could command, her loyalty to her D.C. fans and the clubs where she started out remained strong. Pigfoot was long-closed but the One Step Down had a special place in her heart.

I discovered the One Step Down in 1963 when I was a freshman at Georgetown

University. What drew me to this bar on Pennsylvania Avenue near Washington Circle was its juke box. The owner, Joe Cohen, filled the box with 45 rpm recordings of Miles Davis, John Coltrane, the Modern Jazz Quartet, the Jazz Crusaders, King Pleasure and others. It was a long, fairly narrow room with booths on one side, small tables and chairs on the other, the bar at the rear. In the 1960s it was a hangout for hipsters and students who wanted good jazz to accompany their drinks and conversation. Joe tended bar at night while his brother covered the lunch crowd. In the mid-'70s, pianist Lawrence Wheatley convinced Joe he could accommodate live music for Wheatley's workshops. Then Ann Mabucci arrived from New York City and she convinced Joe she could book major acts. And did she ever! Benny Carter, James Moody and Lee Konitz were among the artists she brought to the club, just to name a few alto saxophonists. Sunday nights were reserved for Shirley.

There was no bandstand. Space was cleared at the end of the bar by removing some tables to accommodate a baby grand piano and a drum set. The bar stool at the end of the bar next to the performance space was seemingly reserved for Staf Rosenberg whose banker-like appearance belied his very hip background. Originally from Sweden, he hung out on 52nd Street while on leave from the U.S. Army during World War II. He knew all of the musicians who played at the club. It was fascinating to overhear his conversation with Walter Bishop about Charlie Parker performances he caught. His friendship with Shirley went back to the 1950s when he first moved to DC. He never missed a Sunday night performance.

Joe and Ann both worked behind the bar. Although theirs was purely a business relationship, they fussed with each other as if they were the long-married couple running a mom-and-pop candy shop. It was another show to watch them between sets while sitting at the bar. Shirley loved them. At a time in the '90s when she could have been the headliner at the Blue Note in New York City on New Years Eve, she regularly performed this holiday event at the One Step Down.

As Shirley's income increased so did the size of her house on Lawrence Street. Rather than move to a mansion in L.A., she had additions built to her house in D.C. When I visited her in August of 1998 for an interview, she proudly showed me the large room that accommodated a grand piano. She joked that the D.C. Government wouldn't issue her any more permits to build further additions. After she had her foot amputated because of diabetes in 2002, she could no longer handle all the steps in the house on Lawrence Street. She and Shep moved to a single-level home in Upper Marlboro, Maryland where she had a motorized wheelchair to scoot around in.

It was great to see her honored in 2004 with a Jazz Master award by the National Endowment for the Arts and to be at the Kennedy Center in December of that year to see her perform at the piano singing *Here's To Life*. I had tears in my eyes. I don't think there was a dry eye among her D.C. fans that night. Not a year later I was at her funeral.

What is so great about the discovery and release of this recording is that it captures Shirley Horn in an environment that she preferred, a small club where the audience is relaxed and she could be herself. It may be Vegas, but it's like hearing her at the One Step Down!

RUSTY HASSAN

Managing Shirley Horn

by Sheila Mathis

The first time I met Shirley Horn, she strolled into the offices of Verve Records like she was floating, intentionally unaware of her surroundings, fully focused on where she was heading, knowing all eyes were on her. She had *presence*. Then she said, "Hello" in a melodious marvel of a voice. I was to experience that same grace, presence and voice many times over the years to come whenever, in a relaxed, liquid motion, she made her entrance onto stages all over the world.



Shirley often wore a swing jacket, about thigh length, with three-quarter sleeves so as not to interfere with her piano playing. Most of her garments were made by a local seamstress near her Washington, D.C. home. One of her particular idiosyncrasies was that she played the piano wearing gloves. For performances she wore soft black gloves. Her favorite ones, a velvet pair from Paris, didn't have seams on the finger tips.

On her right pinky finger she always wore the same jeweled ring; she once told me its weight helped balance her hand and she felt awkward playing without it.

Her instrument of choice was a nine-foot Steinway D concert grand, the lid removed so there was nothing between the piano's sound and those listening. In performance, she positioned her trio on stage in a triangle. This configuration enabled the bass player to watch her left hand, as she required, and the allowed the drummer and bassist to be able to see and communicate with one another during the performance. This was her practice no matter if the venue was a large hall or a tiny jazz club. It was the latter setting that suited her shyness; she preferred the intimate interaction with her musicians and her audience.

Once she took the stage, the room would fall silent, hanging on her every utterance. Then her silky, mocha voice would begin a serenade that held audiences spellbound. Her repertoire of songs was vast, but she maintained a core of standards and songs that held special meaning for her, although she never played those selections exactly the same way. She was known by other musicians, critics and jazz aficionados as one of her generation's greatest interpreters of a lyric. She was just as well-known for being able to play and sing the slowest tempos, sustaining the notes seemingly forever, and conveying the lyrics with unusual, yet mesmerizing phrasing.

Shirley Horn was truly a one of a kind. Thankfully, with this recording we will be able to enjoy and celebrate her talents again and again.

SHEILA MATHIS, 2015

Ms. Mathis was Shirley Horn's manager from 1992 until Ms. Horn's death in October, 2005.



So wonderful to hear Mom, Charles and Steve performing live, unaltered and in the moment.

The only thing better is watching Mom play too. Hands so small and beautiful and yet so artistically powerful. My favorite song is "Meditation" and I have to hear it many times before I can move on to the next cut.

Love you Mom, forever and ever.

RAINY

**this package is dedicated to the memories
of shirley horn and charles ables**

SPECIAL THANKS TO RAINY SMITH

Her enthusiasm and support made our release of this album possible.

EXTRA SPECIAL THANKS TO STEVE WILLIAMS AND SHEILA MATHIS

WITH VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO BEN KLINE

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Heidi T. Kalison, KNPR, Florence Rogers, Brian Sanders, Richard Seidel

Shirley Horn live at the 4 queens

1. SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME (3:24)
2. LOVER MAN (5:14)
3. JUST FOR A THRILL (5:10)
4. HI-FLY (7:41)
5. YOU'D BE SO NICE TO COME HOME TO (3:51)
6. MEDITATION (9:03)
7. THE BOY FROM IPANEMA (5:22)
8. ISN'T IT ROMANTIC (12:10)
9. BLUES FOR BIG SCOTIA (2:58)





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