

MIMI FOX

Internationally renowned guitarist/ composer/ recording artist Mimi Fox will be featured at the Palm Springs Women's Jazz Festival on April 4th 2014



The Woman With The Platinum Fingers

By Sweet Baby J'ai

Hold the press! Did I hear somebody say winner of six consecutive Downbeat magazine international critics' polls? Consecutive? Who is this woman? I made it my business to find out.

To date, I have not had the pleasure of performing with Mimi Fox, which is amazing considering we travel in some of the same circles. Jazz musicians, particularly women, tend to cross each other's paths at one point or another, if not on stage, either in the green room or the airport. When I spoke with Mimi last year about playing with the Women In Jazz All-Stars for the Palm Springs Women's Jazz Festival, I was thrilled that she could do it. Mimi has performed and/or recorded with some of jazz's most prestigious players, including guitarists Charlie Byrd, Stanley Jordan, saxophonists Branford Marsalis, David Sanchez and Houston

Person, vocalists Abbey Lincoln, Diana Krall, Kevin Mahogany and Janis Siegel (Manhattan Transfer), B3 organ masters Joey DeFrancesco, Barbara Denerlein and Dr. Lonnie Smith, and powerhouse drummer Terri Lyne Carrington. So needless to say, after our April date in Palm Springs I'll be listed in great company!

Coincident with the Kraft Nabisco Women's Golf Championship in Rancho Mirage, Palm Springs will once again host Dinah Shore Women's Week. It's been billed as one of the largest gatherings of lesbians in the world. And this year, with the addition of **The Palm Springs Women's Jazz Festival**, the Dinah Week crowds are expected to grow even larger! Over 40 national and international celebrated female jazz musicians will showcase their talent in Palm Springs on April 3-6, 2014. Residents throughout the

desert and visitors from all over the world will gather to celebrate the musical history and the contribution that women have played in jazz. The Festival's mission is to showcase Southern California's vast female jazz talent alongside national and international artists in order to encourage and educate audiences on a wide range of musical experiences. It emphasizes the great stylistic and thematic diversity of women by featuring straight-ahead jazz, smooth jazz, contemporary jazz, Latin jazz and blues!

The reviews of last year's festival were so dynamic that some of you thought it couldn't get any better. Well, I've got news for you--the 2014 festival will knock your socks off! Hold the press divas and daddios! This year we will be joined by **The Women With The Platinum Fingers, guitarist, Mimi Fox!**

What better way of finding out who Mimi Fox is than by asking her directly? So, that's just what I did. I am sure that once you read about her, listen to her music and watch her magic fingers up close and in person, you'll fall in love with her just as I did.

SBJ: Who is Mimi Fox?

MF: I am a guitarist who has devoted my life to the study of this majestic instrument. I started playing when I was 10 years old, and I knew from the moment I first touched a guitar that this was what I was meant to do.

SBJ: I mean "really" who are you? Yes, we do want to know what you do, but we also want to know how you got to be Mimi. Were you one of those kids who stayed in and practiced after school when all the other kids were in the street playing stickball?

MF: I loved all sports and I did play stickball! The minute I started playing guitar I stopped everything else. I would come home from school, do my homework then play until supper, and play after supper until I fell asleep. My older brother and sister would laugh at me because I slept with my guitar. I loved it more than anything in the world.

SBJ: Why the guitar and not the piano or another instrument?

MF: I do play other instruments; drums and bass, but I am a composer as well as a guitarist and so the guitar is my instrument of choice--my voice, to express myself artistically. I still have a drum kit and use it to work out grooves/feels when I am working on a new composition. I have had many drummers say that my playing style has unusual rhythmic twists that they enjoy. I think I developed this rhythmic skill/confidence from playing drums.

SBJ: What was it about the guitar that drew you in? For instance, the bass has a very distinct musical voice as well, just look at bassists/composers, Charles Mingus, Marcus Miller and Oscar Pettiford, they talk up a storm on those four or five strings. When did you discover you could speak through the guitar and how did you find your voice?

MF: I loved music so much and I had a natural affinity for it. I could watch someone play something on guitar, bass or drums and then play it back immediately. I love bass and drums because they are the heartbeat of the music, the rhythm section. With guitar I am able to play bass lines and can approximate all kinds of cool drum



rhythms, so for me the guitar is a composite of my three favorite instruments.

SBJ: So that would explain those platinum fingers! Not to mention I heard your fingers move at lightening speed. Are they insured like Tina Turner and Shirley MacLaine's legs were?

MF: I suppose they *should* be insured, but I think I looked into it once and the cost was prohibitive!

SBJ: Who were your musical influences growing up and who are they now? What was the evolution of Mimi Fox?

MF: My early influences were the songwriters such as Lennon/McCartney, Paul Simon, Joni Mitchell, and Stevie Wonder. When I started getting serious about jazz, I was deeply influenced by John Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Wes Montgomery, Thelonius Monk, and Art Blakey.

SBJ: Yes, I can hear those inspirations in your playing. They all share the juxtaposition of cool and all with the same passionate approach to their music. Okay, I think we're starting to get it--a little more insight into what makes you Mimi. You've

played women's music festivals before; how do they differ from the "standard" jazz fest?

MF: There's a wonderfully supportive atmosphere that can be felt amongst both the musicians and the audience. Women support each other and tend to work collaboratively with both their fellow artists and with festival promoters. Camaraderie develops amongst all of us, and it is really fun to meet other women players because so often I am the only women instrumentalist on stage, and this can be isolating. Sisterhood is as powerful in jazz as it is in other professions.

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SBJ: Few female instrumentalists have had as much career success and international recognition as you. What do you attribute that to?

MF: I attribute ALL my successes to the brave women who went before me. Women from the civil rights movement, the women's movement and many women before them as well. From Harriet Tubman to Gloria Steinem, these women remind me that the struggles I have faced can be put into context and that I must never lose sight of my dreams no matter what

MIMI FOX RECORDINGS

2013 *Standards, Old and New*
 2011 *Live at the Palladium*
 2006 *Perpetually Hip*
 2004 *She's The Woman*
 2003 *Two For The Road*
 2001 *Standards*
 2000 *Like A Bird*
 1999 *Kicks*
 1995 *Turtle Logic*
 1993 *Mimi Fox Live*
 1985 *Against The Grain*

Visit www.mimifox.com
 for a detailed discography list



While Fox makes her first impression with her technical skills, it's her emotional depth as a player that leaves an enduring mark.

-- Andrew Gilbert, *Downbeat Magazine*

obstacles I encounter--and I have encountered many both internal and external. For many girls and young women who are trying to make their way in the jazz world, self-esteem is a critical factor. If you don't believe in yourself, it is hard to have the courage to get on stage and give your all. And, in the highly competitive environment of the jazz world where you have to constantly prove yourself to gain respect, this can be a very high bar for many women.

“Many times I have had to endure sexist, vulgar jokes, disparaging comments about me and/or fellow female artists, and fend off unwanted advances.”

SBJ: It's great that young female musicians today have role models like you to set the stage for them. Instrumentalists like trumpeter Tiny Davis and flautist Bobbi Humphrey paved the way for you. Do you think things have changed much since they laid the groundwork?

MF: Yes, and no. In my travels throughout the world, I have met more and more wonderful women musicians on every instrument. This is very exciting! However, women still face enormous hurdles in terms of being recognized, getting prestigious offers, and getting respect from their peers. Most great women musicians must contend with a world that is still uneasy with powerful women. I am heartened to see all the wonderful young women players, but disheartened to hear that the world at large is no more welcoming to these young women than it was for my peers and me. Change takes a long time. I always tell young women that

it's vital that they find the people, both women and men who will support them and their music. If someone disses you, lose 'em as fast as you can!

SBJ: Tell me about it! Can you share one of those hurdles you have had to overcome?

MF: When I was 19, a good guitarist whom I admired came to a show and said to me: “You play okay rhythm Mimi, but you shouldn't try and solo--girls don't have the balls to do this well”. That is one of the most flagrant examples of the sexism I've encountered, but there were many more. Many times I have had to endure sexist, vulgar jokes, disparaging comments about me and/or fellow female artists and also fend off unwanted advances. I learned early on to channel my anger and hurt into a focused discipline. The more bad crap that was thrown at me, the harder I practiced. I also came to realize that this was not personal, it was a systemic problem. By not personalizing things, I was able to keep my focus and continue to brave the waters. To this day, I remind younger women not to let the jerks keep them away from their music.

SBJ: Can you paint a picture of what happiness looks like to you?

MF: Happiness to me is being with my

wonderful girlfriend, all my incredible friends, playing with great musicians, touching people through my music, and working for a more just and humane world. I am also a sci-fi junkie and I love cats. I love dogs too (and all animals), but I have a special affinity for cats. I suppose being on the road so much it would be very hard to have a dog and leave them behind. Cats are much lower maintenance in this regard. I also love the outdoors and enjoy hiking, biking, swimming, etc. My other hobbies are crossword puzzles and scrabble.

SBJ: Cats, hikes, bikes, lots of hugs and snuggles and an occasional “Alien” movie when you have time--nice picture. Thank you for sharing and giving us the opportunity to get to know you.

Mimi was born in Queens, New York. She is the youngest child of a middle class, Jewish family. Her father Eli was a writer and publicist and had a huge collection of jazz

albums. Her mother Anne was a singer/songwriter who loved all the great jazz vocalists as well as classical and chamber music. Mimi picked up the guitar when she was just 10 years old and never let it go. It's easy to see why this child prodigy would gravitate to jazz; she was born to it!

You can catch Mimi Fox on Friday, April 4th, 2014 at The 2nd Annual Palm Springs Women's Jazz Festival - Dinah Weekend with the Women in Jazz All-Stars at the Indian Canyon Golf Resort, 1097 E. Murray Canyon Dr. Palm Springs, CA 92262. (760) 833-8704 Showtime 7:00 PM

The Festival features an amazing lineup of talent, including *Smooth Jazz Superstars*, trumpeter *Cindy Bradley* and *Saxophonist Pamela Williams*, *Living Blues Legend*, vocalist *Lady GG*, Grammy nominated vocalist *Perla Batalla*, *International Renowned violinist Karen Briggs* and many more! Four days of music, 10 concerts, over 40 top celebrated female musicians, a gala Brunch show, the full spectrum of jazz and blues, after parties, tributes to legendary jazz and blues divas, nationally and internationally acclaimed artists, food, drinks and much more! For tickets and more information visit www.pswomensjazzfestival.com

Sweet Baby J'ai is a contributing writer for LN Magazine, a singer, composer, arranger, educator, and the Artistic Director of the Palm Springs Women's Jazz Festival. A creative force on the music scene for over two decades, she



tours the world with her genre-defying work, which both embraces and expands jazz tradition. She has worked in various capacities, including talent buyer for major music events throughout the country. She also serves as Creative Managing Director for the Educational Theatre Institute. J'ai brings a new perspective to programming choices featuring some of the world's most visible, high level jazz artists. By bringing together a carefully crafted, eclectic selection of exceptional performers, her Women in Jazz All-Stars always produce memorable and unexpected surprises!