

Jan Findlay

As a little girl, Jan Findlay would happily sit on her mother's lap while she played piano. She'd place Jan's hands on top of hers so she could absorb what it was like to feel and experience the music. She had begun to absorb music's power and passion, dominant forces in her life ever since. Through her school years Jan performed in choruses, New Jersey all state choirs, and at Pax Amicus Theatre in both musical and dramatic productions.

Jan has now been singing professionally for over forty years, having started as a teenager in a jazz trio with two of her peers. Jan and life-long friend Ben Cassara shared singing roles and played string bass and piano respectively. They were regularly booked at a local club where the patrons responded with great enthusiasm. Jan recalls that "we were just kids performing the songs that we loved, songs that happened to be a lot older than we were."

Later, Jan sang and played upright bass with her husband, Bob, who played guitar and sang backup vocals. During this busy eight year period they pressed a 45 rpm recording of original tunes that received much air play, performed on TV, and sang at nearly 100 venues in the New York New Jersey area.

The next chapter of Jan's singing career, beginning in 1987, featured performing in the Manhattan cabaret circuit, which included The Duplex, Don't Tell Mama, and Eighty Eights. For the performances of her show, "Jazz Swing n' Blues," Jan was accompanied by Julliard's Dan Cataneo.

While performing one night as guest vocalist for a big band, she met piano player and arranger Howard Williams, known for his work with Woody Herman and John Coltrane. For the next few years she sang to Howard's accompaniment at Robert's in Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen. Howard formed a big band which attracted several of New York's premiere musicians drawn to Howard's brilliant charts. Jan had the distinction of being the Howard Williams Jazz Orchestra's original vocalist, enjoying the company of outstanding musicians, such as Frank Vicari, Danny Hayes, Jerry Weldon, John Eckert, Lou Caputo, Bill Mobley, Virginia Mayhew, Doug Lawrence, Roy Cumming, Todd Bashore, and many others. She sang with the band for eight years, the last six at The Garage in Greenwich Village. Jan and the band also performed at The Manor, St. Peter's Church, and Tavern on the Green.

In addition to singing with the big band, Jan began performing with guitarists Art Baumgarten and Ernie Fortunato in New York and New Jersey clubs. Although this was a valuable experience, Jan came to realize that she preferred to sing with a piano and bass accompaniment.

Soon Jan met Jay D'Amico, an extremely talented Brooklyn based jazz pianist/arranger/composer. Along with Greg D'Amico on bass, they performed regularly in New York for several years, occasionally venturing into New Jersey for bookings at

Shanghai Jazz in Madison. Jan's CD, "Old Devil Moon," was recorded with this group, a natural outgrowth of a most satisfying and rewarding musical experience.

Jan's musical base then returned to her home state of New Jersey where she has enjoyed performing with artists such as Jerry Vezza, John Carlini, Keith Ingham, Bob Himmelberger, and the late Steve Freeman. She most frequently appears with Tomoko Ohno on piano, John Zweig on guitar, and Rick Crane on bass, all New Jerseyans who are well established and highly regarded in the New Jersey New York jazz community and beyond. Together they find their joy in performing "The Great American Songbook" and a variety of jazz and blues selections. Although singers usually receive top billing, Jan sees herself as party of a group, her voice being her instrument. It's all about sharing music with each other and the audience.

Jan is influenced by a broad range of singers, including Ella Fitzgerald, Julie London, and Nat "King" Cole. She is one of those rare singers who can transition effectively from a ballad that is offered with touchingly gorgeous vocals to a blues tune that has a soulful alto edge. She will "play" with a melody line, believing that sometimes subtle nuances enhance the beauty that is already present in the song. But she doesn't stray too far. Remember, it's very possible that the song may have been learned sitting on her mother's lap.