

ENCORE



RICARDO ANDRE

RENÉE MANNING

A MARRIAGE OF JAZZ AND R&B

BY JIM MOTAVALLI

Vocalist Renée Manning, a very physical singer with a long and varied career, who last month celebrated her 70th birthday with a gala concert at Drom, reports it's the combined influence of Ella Fitzgerald and Aretha Franklin who inform her dedication to the art of putting a song over. The birthday event featured her R&B-flavored jazz singing with husband and longtime collaborator, tuba-bass trombone player and arranger Earl McIntyre, plus a 15-piece group with strings, brass, rhythm section and backup vocalists. "I'd dreamed about doing a big concert with full orchestra," the Brooklyn-born Manning says. "I left out the Italian arias, but I did music from every part of my career: some tunes Earl and I wrote together, some funk, some jazz and of course the blues that people like to hear me sing. The centerpiece: my piece called 'Life.'" Everything Manning does seems to have an R&B edge to it. "But," she said, "what got me over in jazz is working with big bands—I just love the electricity of that music." It was jazz (and a bit of funk) that brought her and McIntyre together in the first place, and the couple have been married since 1978.

Manning's discography may be slim but is impressive. Her leader debut album, *As Is* (1991)—with a first call band that included Dick Oatts (alto, flute), Ralph Lalama (tenor, flute), Billy Butler (guitar), Ronnie Mathews (piano), Rufus Reid (bass) and Kenny Washington (drums)—features both standards such as "Bye Bye Blackbird" as well as blues numbers including "Don't You Feel My Leg". Her follow-up, *Uhm..Uhm..Uhm*, actually combines sessions recorded several years prior (1986 and 1989), with the Mel Lewis Orchestra (with which she sang from 1983-89), as well as a smaller group that included Art Ensemble of Chicago trumpeter Lester Bowie, Oatts and others. The album also includes what has since become her signature song, "Evil Gal Blues". A decade prior to that, she appeared on cornetist Nat Adderley's *Hummin'* (1976) and saxophonist-flutist David "Fathead" Newman's

Keep the Dream Alive (1977). Some of that experience came from connections made in funk bands, such as Ear Candy, which featured many jazz musicians (e.g. Oatts, as well as pianist-keyboardists Kenny Kirkland and Onaje Allan Gumbs). With Swiss pianist George Gruntz' Concert Jazz Band, she toured worldwide and recorded *Global Excellence* (2001). And in 2009 she released the only other album under her name, *All Grown Up*, a jazz album for children.

Manning tells great stories: from her encounters with both Carmen McRae and Lena Horne (each vocalist advised and supported her); singing with Pharoah Sanders and McCoy Tyner for a televised jam session in Switzerland; rehearsing at bassist Walter Booker's studio with the Herbie Hancock Sextet in one room and the first version of Weather Report in another; her work with David Amram and others. She also recalled a lucky break she had, when "Mel (Lewis) came down to Mikell's to see our funk band, which was funny because he hated funk," she says. "But he heard something in my singing and invited me down to the Village Vanguard. I learned two songs, and when they were done, I was putting on my coat when Max Gordon [founder of the Vanguard] said, 'No, you should stay.' I ended up being with the band for six years (the band's longest tenured vocalist) and had charts written for me by Thad Jones, Bob Belden, Maria Schneider and Rufus Reid." Far from being a diva, Manning says, "I've always been a team player—never a drama queen. I'm more like one of the guys, and because of that the musicians really back me up."

The vocalist grew up in the mixed, melting pot neighborhood of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. She took tap dance lessons at an early age, and by four she was already wowing the grownups as, she says, "a chocolate Shirley Temple." But singing prevailed and by 16 she was performing at vocalist Lloyd Price's Crawdaddy Club. Manning originally met McIntyre in 1972 when she was still at the High School of Music & Art in Manhattan (which would become LaGuardia High School of Music & The Arts). "Earl had written a piece for the girls' choir, and he needed someone who could sing the high parts," she recollected. "Back then I had a range something like Minnie Riperton's." When Manning gave birth to her first child in 1978, her voice dropped an octave and a fifth, turning her from a soprano to a contralto. Consequently she was often taken for a man on the phone. Fondly remembered musical coach, Carmine Caruso, however, helped Manning to find her voice again.

She taught voice and choir at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, and co-founded Excelsior Music Studio, teaching people of all ages in private lessons and master classes. Both Manning and McIntyre worked with bluesman Taj Mahal (McIntyre, who went on the road at 17 with Mahal, was in the guitarist-vocalist's band that included three other tuba players: Howard Johnson, Joe Daley and Bob Stewart). The pair have also worked for decades with pianist and composer Arturo O'Farrill, who says, "She's an amazing singer. And Earl, one of the most musical humans I know, is a great arranger for some of my crazy compositions." Colleague and bassist Reid adds, "I've been playing with Earl and Renée for a long time, and it's always a pleasure and fun to be with both of them."

This month at Shapeshifter Lab in Brooklyn, Manning will be part of a nine-piece band McIntyre put together for the fourth in his regular series of tribute shows. The show spotlights Sidney Poitier, Josephine Baker (in whose band he played) and Langston Hughes. "They're all people I came in contact with," McIntyre says. "A teacher of African American history whose class I was in took us on a field trip to Harlem, around 1963 or '64: we saw a place where Malcolm X spoke and then, while we were eating at Chock Full O'Nuts, she introduced us to her actor friend Poitier, and then she took us to meet Langston Hughes—all in one day."

Manning and McIntyre live and work in the tradition of some great wife-and-husband teams—Etta Jones and Houston Person, Lil Hardin and Louis Armstrong, Cleo Laine and John Dankworth, Stacey Kent and Jim Tomlinson, Judi Silvano and Joe Lovano, Jeannie and Jimmy Cheatham, et al. Planning ahead, Manning has long-wanted to record an album with strings in addition to McIntyre's horns; that's likely to happen next.

For more info visit excelsiormusicstudio.com. Manning is at Shapeshifter Lab Mar. 9 (with Earl McIntyre). See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- David "Fathead" Newman—*Keep the Dream Alive* (Prestige, 1976)
- Renée Manning—*Uhm..Uhm..Uhm* (Bellaphon-Ken Music, 1986,'89,'91)
- Renée Manning—*As Is* (Bellaphon-Ken Music, 1991)
- Renée Manning—*All Grown Up* (s/r, 2009)
- Earl McIntyre—*Brass Carnival & Tribute!* (s/r, 2010)
- Arturo O'Farrill Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra—*Cuba: The Conversation Continues* (Motéma Music, 2014)

LEST WE FORGET



BRIAN MCMILLEN

EMILY REMLER

BORN TO PLAY GUITAR

BY KEN DRYDEN

Some jazz musicians appear suddenly and make an impact, only to die tragically young. Emily Remler was an eager, competitive jazz guitarist who focused on improving her technique and desire to prove herself on the bandstand. After taking up the guitar at 8 years old and eventually switching from rock to jazz after entering Boston's Berklee College of Music at the age of 17, Remler was already showing promise to her professors and fellow students. Graduating in 1976, she relocated with fellow alum, guitarist Steve Masakowski, to New Orleans, where she played in a wide variety of settings including jazz. After meeting guitar master Herb Ellis there, he recommended her to Concord Jazz

label founder Carl E. Jefferson to open the doors wide for her future. Her first appearance at the Concord Jazz Festival, and subsequent appearance on The Clayton Brothers' *It's All In The Family*, led to her signing with Concord Jazz, where she would record four albums as a leader over the next several years, plus a duo recording with fellow guitarist Larry Coryell, along with Concord releases by bassist Ray Brown, pianist John Colianni and vocalists Susannah McCorkle and Rosemary Clooney. But it was *East to Wes*, her last album for the label—a tribute to one of her major influences, Wes Montgomery, and which included pianist Hank Jones, bassist Buster Williams and drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith—that drew national recognition.

The guitarist's sudden death in Australia during a 1990 tour at age 32 was a shock to the jazz world. Yet, although the official cause of death was a heart attack, many knew she'd long struggled with a serious opioid addiction. Remler's final album, *This Is Me* (Justice), was issued posthumously later that year and represented a major stylistic change to contemporary jazz and fusion, featuring her originals with electric keyboards and guitar synthesizer. It's impossible, however, to know

if this shift would have been permanent, or just an expansion of her interests. Two of the guitarist's live sets at the Hotel Four Queens were issued this year on the acclaimed Resonance set, *Cookin' at the Queens: Live in Las Vegas* (1984 & 1988). And hopefully other live broadcasts will be licensed for release, including a Four Queens show with Coryell, plus a concert at Manchester Craftsman's Guild in Pittsburgh, where she relocated after leaving NYC in 1986.

Drummer Duduka da Fonseca met Remler in the early '80s before she was widely known, when they played in vocalist Astrud Gilberto's band. They developed a friendship as they toured Europe with Gilberto. "Emily was a wonderful musician. We became good friends through the years that we worked together." A few years later, the drummer was pleased when he received a call from the guitarist to record with her on *This Is Me*. After recording was completed and mixing the album was due to begin, he recalls, "She called me to join her in the studio out of friendship." Remler died not long afterward.

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