

Andy Bey was one of the true pioneers of this music. The very first time I met him was in Chicago in 1979, although we really didn't get to know each other personally until I moved to New York in the early '80s. He had his own style and a brilliant touch as a pianist, paired with a melodious singing voice. Some of his original compositions were just to die for.

The most memorable occasion I spent with Andy was either in 1996 or 1997 at the North Sea Jazz Festival. We were talking about music, when he came out and told me he had just been diagnosed with HIV. I told him that I was actually just diagnosed too, so that bonded us. I guess we shared the sentiment that we both were somewhat still in denial. He said at that time, "I don't think I want to take all those pills. I wanna take natural remedies—herbs and teas." That was his belief: that HIV could be cured that way. I don't know if he ever switched to traditional medicine, but clearly he lived a long time. I think one of the things that made it so hard for both he and I to comprehend about our condition is the fact that it was no longer a death sentence like it was in the early days.

I would go support him in his declining years of health, and I loved that he was still a go-getter, despite the circumstances. I believe that was, in part, because to be living with this condition and still living so long made him emotional. I think it actually made him even hungrier than when he was younger. I would go religiously to hear him because he still had that spark of creativity and imagination, even at his age, and it was so inspiring to witness and experience. It was an honor to hear him play solo piano. Sometimes I'd get up and play for him while he sang; then he'd play for me. We were inseparable as friends when we happened to be in each other's presence and started talking about the old days. Also, at that stage in life, we were both comfortable enough to also discuss our sexuality, about being gay or bisexual, which was much more accepted in this time than while we were in the earlier stages of our careers. I've been HIV positive over 20 years, and I'm undetectable and have been for many years. People with HIV might find this a very sensitive topic, but you can live a normal life if you do what you're supposed to. I hope I can live to be 85, just like Andy!

—JOHNNY O'NEAL (piano, vocals)

Andy Bey was an amazing musician, and a wonderful person. I was privileged to work with him for nine years, playing guitar on three of his albums, as well as performing and touring with him. His music was soulful and swinging, with deep roots in tradition yet profoundly modern, sometimes very gentle and sometimes incredibly powerful—and his sense of humor could be there too. Just as he was as a person. With his unique approach as a singer and pianist, he created a musical magic that was deeply personal and universal. Thank you, Andy, for the great gift you brought to all of us.

—PAUL MEYERS (guitar)

Andy and I met in the early '90s and we struck up a bit of a friendship. I first heard about him through that recording he did with Stanley Clarke (*Children of Forever*, 1972) featuring Chick Corea, and was just knocked out. In 1992-93, when I did my first Classical Action: Performing Arts Against AIDS benefit, now part of Broadway Cares: Equity Fights Aids, he recorded a piano-vocal solo of "Nobody Else But Me" at an incredibly slow, Shirley Horn tempo. It was around the time of that 1993 album release (*Last Night When We Were Young: The Ballad Album*), I came out about being gay and HIV positive. Part of the reason I came out was to make it better for those coming after me. It's like anything: if you know gay people, you're going to be less likely to discriminate against them or be stigmatized. Back then, we didn't even know how long we were going to live. Andy came and asked me about coming out, the pros and cons and whatnot. I was honored he came to me to test the waters, and I tried to be helpful. I said to him, "You're totally unique, and it's better off being yourself than worrying about what anyone thinks...Just go for it!" He did come out, several years later, and we did talk again about his HIV status and I gave him some medical leads. I would see him perform now and then, and on the second Classical Action album (*Fred Hersch & Friends: The Duo Album*), I played behind him and we did "Alone Together". It was admittedly intimidating. I was really conscious of giving him enough space, even though it was never going to be like him playing for himself. He was simply astounding as a vocalist and as a recording artist who was a professional for 60-odd years. Andy went from a well-kept secret to receiving well-deserved accolades. As well-known as he became, though, I believe he deserved more. When you're that unique, you're not going to be everybody's taste, but he was such a superb musician and interpreter. And that crazy voice, all the way from the lowest lows to the highest falsetto!

—FRED HERSCH (piano)

Andy Bey was one of the few singers who I would pay double to hear. The reason is because he sang with such feeling, technical skill and sincerity that I knew I would get a thrill whenever I heard him sing live.

—MARION COWINGS (vocals)

Andy had been performing since he was 3. He was the baby in our family of nine children. We all thought he was the gift to the Bey family, as he had such a distinct voice. When Andy and The Bey Sisters came along, we were quite the trio, with Salome the alto voice between Andy and me. His body was the music, and he had this unique way of expressing himself. None of us really read music, but we would learn music just from his ears. We'd rehearse and practice from the keys and notes he would give us from what he had in his body. It was like a miracle to have this kind of human being in our family. I thought that he was just incredible and was privileged to be able to work and sing with my brother.

—GERALDINE DE HAAS (vocals)

Andy Bey was one of the most underrated geniuses of voice and piano—an extraordinary artist who deserved far more acclaim in his lifetime. A prodigious singer and pianist, he had a singular sonic vision. As a child of the '40s, he was deeply rooted in the rich tapestry of Black American musical traditions. From big band and swing to boogie-woogie, rock and roll, soul and disco—these sounds lived in him. He absorbed them all and let them pour through his music. Andy was full of life, love, and music. You could hear it in every note—he meant every single one. He taught us how to allow the music to embody our lives and vice versa. He is my hero and will be dearly missed.

—TYREEK MCDOLE (vocals)

Hearing that Andy Bey had crossed over, had transitioned, from singer José James while on a bus in Abu Dhabi for International Jazz Day (Apr. 30), hit me like a punch in the gut, and the tears flowed...I wept like a baby! How could this be, the man whose voice had serenaded me to sleep when my mind wouldn't shut off, this elusive individual who I could only find on rare occasions, this human being with that velvety sound and the gentle piano accompaniment? The man who coaxed me to take his place singing "Love Vibrations" during a Horace Silver tour where he and my then husband, Cecil Bridgewater, were mates in Horace's band, because he was sure Horace wouldn't mind...Horace kicked me off the stage. The man whose vocal phrasing intimidated me when we recorded "Butterfly Dreams" on Stanley Clarke's album *Children of Forever*. That Andy was no longer on this earth left me speechless and regretting that I never told him the immense impression he made on me, a young woman from Flint, Michigan. Thank you, Andy Bey, for all that you were and all that you are. I am forever grateful to you for seeing me, nudging and nurturing me to be my individual self. Rest in Peace, Rest In Power, Rest in Love, Andy Bey. You and your celestial voice are now in the heavenly choir of Jazz Angels!

—DEE DEE BRIDGEWATER (vocals)

Andy Bey was a singular singer, strangely not copied like, say Mark Murphy, whose style has launched a thousand careers. What Andy was, was not imitable. He was channeling his music from a very deep, wordless place that was everything he was—African, American, descended from slavery but who knows from what ancestry before that, maybe African royalty. He "rang true," which is always profoundly moving when you witness it, whether in music or life. He also had fantastic taste in repertoire, which he lifted from various sources—pop, Brazilian, jazz—making everything his own with that beautiful, expressive voice of his.

—TESSA SOUTER (vocals)

I have had the pleasure of:  
...listening to Mr. Bey's great voice  
...listening to his interesting piano playing  
...meeting his family  
...making music for and with him.  
I miss him and his voice.

—RON CARTER (bass)

I first heard Andy Bey around 1983. Someone said to me, "Your sound reminds me of Andy Bey." Of course, my curious mind made me research and go back to his music and look up his recordings, particularly the stuff he did with Gary Bartz, Horace Silver and with his sisters: Andy and The Bey Sisters. I honestly didn't hear that we sounded anything alike at all, but I did know he had one of the most distinctive voices I had ever heard, and I became a great admirer of his. I recall hearing him sing at Catalina's in L.A. with Horace Silver, who also had around five horn players in his band at the time. The odd thing about it, though, is that the etiquette there is when the lights go down, everyone immediately goes quiet and listens to the music. Horace played, and the crowd was quiet...until Andy got up there. And somehow everybody started talking. I was shocked. That was just one of the saddest things that I had ever witnessed, that this man with this amazing voice was being completely ignored. I thought that one of the reasons might have been because his voice was so distinct and different that the crowd couldn't compare him to anything. In any case, this experience stuck with me for a few years, and so I wanted to pay tribute to Andy Bey on one of my recordings. I had heard his version of "Celestial Blues" from his debut (*Experience and Judgment*) and the Gary Bartz NTU Troop version, but it didn't make sense to do this song the way it had already been done. I slowed it further down and made it a ballad, and would release it on my record *Living Water*. I had told Andy I was doing "Celestial Blues" and wanted him to hear it. After he listened to it, he told me that he loved it, and that made me feel really good. By the time that record came out (2004) was also around the same time he began to get people turning on to him, when he became one of the frontline jazz singers. It was good to know that before he left the planet that people found out about Andy Bey and that he got a few of some of his flowers.

—DWIGHT TRIBLE (vocals)

Andy Bey was/is one of the greatest musical instruments I have ever created music with. He taught me what a voice is and the delicate power that it can wield in all directions.

—GARY BARTZ (alto saxophone)

ANDY BEY  
1939-2025

ALAN NAHIGIAN