

INGRID JENSEN

TO BE WHAT YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE

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Vancouver-born trumpeter and educator, Ingrid Jensen, has for over 30 years become widely known and respected for her harmonically sophisticated post-bop style. Growing up with the music of pianist (and fellow Canadian) Oscar Peterson and the joyful swing that filled her childhood home, it practically seemed inevitable that she would pursue a career in jazz. Yet, when Jensen told her parents she wanted to pursue music, they were fearful whether this choice would be a viable career path. How many young girls of a certain time and place have heard that “warning”?! Jensen has not only prevailed and succeeded, but as her longtime collaborator, pianist-organist-accordionist Gary Versace notes, “Ingrid has also been a major influence for women in jazz as a trumpeter, educator and bandleader for many years. She often inspires young women who attend her shows not only with her playing, but by encouraging them to bring their horns and inviting them onstage to play with her.”

But those old roots about a “woman’s place” run deep. Jensen explains that her mother should have been a professional classical pianist but her parents discouraged her, telling her she had to get a “real job,” forcing her mother do things she didn’t want to do. “My mother lived like the old school: women can’t be musicians. You had to get a job teaching in a school.” Displaying a photo of her mother playing the piano (via our Zoom conversation), Jensen adds, “Look at the joy on her face.” Her parents’ concern about her life choices were exacerbated by any evidence that women can play jazz trumpet, so “what else are you going to do?” But Jensen was determined. In the early ‘80s, in her first year of college, she was already playing a lot of gigs and developing what would eventually become her sound. “At that point,” she says, “the only other woman, playing at the level that I was on a trajectory for, was Stacy Rowles,” who also happened to be esteemed jazz pianist Jimmy Rowles’ trumpet-playing daughter.

After leaving Vancouver, Jensen was on the move — to Boston to Copenhagen, where she reconnected with her Scandinavian roots, to New York and Vienna for three years. Reflecting on her experiences in Europe, she declared them transformative, so much so that she says, she “wouldn’t be sitting here right now” without them. Because she also came to understand that jazz musicians gravitate to one another across the globe, Jensen felt that strong community in Vienna was invaluable and a significant link to where she is today. While there, she became friends with legendary trumpet-flugelhorn players Art Farmer (who made the city his home for 30 years until his 1999 death) and Clark Terry, who gigged there frequently. She attributes much of the value of Vienna to the lifestyle there: “This quality of life gives everyone a feeling of release where they can truly be themselves and not have to have their guard up.” Finally returning to New York in 1994, prompted by an opportunity to audition for the now 33-year-old DIVA Jazz Orchestra (with which she became a member, playing, touring and

recording), Jensen also made her auspicious leader debut that year with *Vernal Fields* (Enja). The allstar session included Steve Wilson (alto), George Garzone (tenor), Bruce Barth (bass), Larry Grenadier (bass) and Lenny White (drums). In time, other collaborations followed, such as with the Maria Schneider Orchestra and Darcy James Argue’s *Secret Society*, and in 2017 she became a founding member of the international supergroup, ARTEMIS, which to date has recorded three highly-acclaimed albums for Blue Note Records.

Jensen has released ten albums as leader or co-leader, with the new *Landings* (Newvelle) serving as a response to the unpredictable and troubling current political policies and general angst-ridden atmosphere in the US. It’s also musically a new take on the organ trio, with longtime collaborators Marvin Sewell (guitar), Versace (organ) and Jon Wikan (drums), with an aim to reshape the classic organ-band sound with a mix of acoustic warmth and subtle electronic textures. “It is inspired by different pulses of energy that I feel are happening now and have always happened in this country and need to be resolved and made into more of a peaceful pulse than an angry, constant conflict,” Jensen explains. The album title also has a double meaning, with Jensen ‘landing’ back in her position as a bandleader, this marking her first record as sole leader in twenty years. Recorded over two days at EastSide Sound in New York, Jensen explains that the tight group of musicians offers about “150 years of experience” among them, and that cohesion means “we are still going to come up with a lot of stuff together because there’s so much joy in being together in a room and creating together.” Additionally, the record opens with a feature from tenor titan George Coleman who revisits his classic “Amsterdam After Dark”. The nonagenarian jazz legend’s appearance was the result of the saxophonist’s manager getting in touch with Jensen with the request to perform with the group. She suggested Coleman’s “Amsterdam After Dark” as a familiar contemporary standard that lent itself to the organ format, especially in a contrast arrangement of funky rock with jazz. About the special collaboration, Jensen describes it as “otherworldly (and) profound.” She’d grown up listening to Miles Davis, and Coleman’s solos had “been in my head since I was 16 years old!” Who would have dreamed at that time eventually she would be a successful musician in a band playing with him and creating that same vibe together. Jensen recalls her sense of abandonment entering the recording studio with the saxophonist, a vortex of hitting hard and listening even harder to each other. Reflecting on Miles and those “other beautiful musicians who were living from their sweat to the stage with every ounce of their spirit through their instruments,” she adds “it was a full circle moment.” For Coleman, he too was nothing but compliments after the session: “Ingrid is highly talented and what a great sound.”

Throughout the album, Jensen revisits and draws upon symbolism to reflect on the political state,

drawing influence from Margaret Atwood (author of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, a book about a dystopian, totalitarian future of America that suppresses the rights of women). “We are at this place right now,” she states, “where it’s a mystery with what’s going to happen and where we’re at.” She also proffers worried thoughts via the album title’s multiple meaning, reflecting on the future of the authentic experience of jazz itself. Being an increasingly digitized world, with the rise of AI, Jensen finds it all quite frightening regarding the risks in losing the soul of what makes music so profound and powerful: “We are losing the ability to identify whether something is from a real legacy musician or just a rip-off of something people have spent their whole lives researching. It should be illegal. It’s an assault on our characters. It is an assault on humanity.”

With her status and 30+ year professional experience as a world-class trumpeter and performer, Jensen has welcomed stepping into the role of educator, and currently resides on the jazz trumpet faculties of the University of Michigan, Peabody Conservatory and Manhattan School of Music. Her hope is to be a role model for the next generation of female jazz musicians and trumpet players who can look to her as a source of inspiration. One aim is to let them know there is a path for a career in jazz as a woman, something she didn’t see growing up. “There are many young women who play trumpet now because they could see images of me sweating and digging in—and looking kind of cool,” she says with candor. “So for me to be myself and who I am, I think it inspires students of all ilks.” And yet, the work is not done. According to Versace, “With brass playing women bandleaders still being underrepresented in clubs and at festivals, Ingrid continues to be an important mentor for trumpeters and musicians of all ages and proves by example that their dreams and hard work can actually lead to becoming a part of today’s jazz scene.”

Adding a fine point to her goals, Jensen speaks of several of her students who chose the path of gender transition. “I was so glad they could be in my studio so we could really dig into those elements of being who you are.” To stand up for yourself, despite what society is telling you—that’s the legacy of Jensen’s journey to date: to be what you’re supposed to be.

For more info visit ingridjensen.com. Jensen’s album release concert is at Dizzy’s Club Mar. 18. She is also at Zankel Hall Mar. 13 (with ARTEMIS). See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Ingrid Jensen — *Vernal Fields* (Enja, 1994)
- Ingrid Jensen — *Here on Earth* (Enja, 1996)
- George Schuller — *Round ‘Bout Now* (Playscape, 2002)
- Ingrid Jensen/Steve Tressler — *Invisible Sounds: For Kenny Wheeler* (Whirlwind, 2015-16)
- ARTEMIS — *ARTEMIS* (Blue Note, 2018-19)
- Ingrid Jensen — *Landings* (Newvelle, 2025)