

QUEEN BEE

JAZZ HIVE HARMONY

BY KEN WAXMAN

When it comes to releasing music, there are major labels with varied catalogs and almost no creative music; mid-sized labels with large catalogs of cutting-edge sounds and middling distribution; and micro labels with small numbers of carefully-curated releases and limited reach. New York-born, San Francisco Bay Area-based bassist-composer Lisa Mezzacappa, founder/administrator of the Queen Bee imprint, proudly slots her label in the last category. Still, she's spent the past year exponentially enlarging her small catalog by releasing new projects, one session a month, in CD, vinyl and digital forms. Mezzacappa, who describes herself as Queen Bee's "label-mistress," figured that to celebrate her milestones of February 2025's 50th birthday, and 2026's 25th year as a Californian, she would create this series, the 12-in-12 project, with ensembles ranging from duos to large bands. Additionally, the musical spectrum is pure improvisation to through-composed pieces. And she plays on all of them. "I play in so many fabulous ensembles led by creative jazz bandleaders

and composers," she says. Her first aim, she explains, was to lift up those voices and help those musicians get their music out there. "It's unabashedly a vanity project. Please tell me what small label isn't!" she challenges.

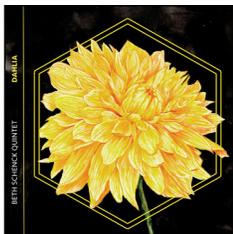
Initially, the idea of starting a label in 2013 was simple. "I decide to put out a record; I do the work that's needed and find a way to pay for it—and repeat," she says. Mezzacappa also reveals that this year is the first time she's worked extensively with other artists, adding that for West Coast musicians, the opportunities to have a recording released on an established label have always been few and far between. Many labels have a limited number of releases and a long backlog, and much interest from artists. "So like many of us, once things started to move in a more DIY direction, I decided to cut out the middleman," she says. "To have a label now is to have a Bandcamp account." The line between having a tiny label and self-releasing has become increasingly blurred, so there are fewer obstacles to getting the music out. The Queen Bee name honors her late grandmother who "took care of everyone in a very, caring but tough-love kind of way." So that title pays tribute to that spirit, and Mezzacappa's desire to "continue in that vein during my artistic life."

Another Bay Area resident, drummer Jordan Glenn says he became involved at the bassist's request, and

for more than a decade has worked with her in many groups. The live recording of his nine-piece Beak band, on which both played, was available, and Mezzacappa asked to include it as part of the label's 12-in-12 project. Glenn agreed and has been featured on four other Queen Bee sessions since. The experiences lived up to his expectations "and then some" he enthuses. "Lisa really cares about supporting her friends and wants others to hear their music," he adds. "She's tireless, works closely with everyone on their records and has an attention to detail and quality that serves the final product." The way Mezzacappa does so is by creating volunteer-run situations with artists financing their own releases and retaining all return on sales. As a self-described "midwife" she provides expertise in project management, administrative support, and promotional and publicity outreach, and enlists others with distribution experience. Mezzacappa is focused: "I try to create a collective structure around these releases where we're supporting each other, promoting each other's work, and feeling our records are connected as part of a community snapshot, rather than one-offs."

Pressings are limited to a few hundred copies at most. Since the 12-in-12 project has come to an end,

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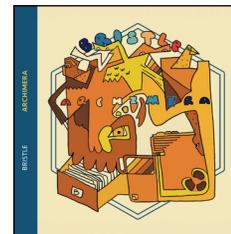
Dahlia
Beth Schenck Quintet



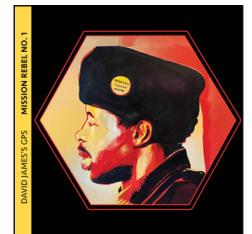
Cosmicomics
Lisa Mezzacappa Six



No Ins & Outs
duo B.



Archimera
Bristle



Mission Rebel No. 1
David James' GPS

VOXNEWS

JAZZ HERSTORY

BY TESSA SOUTER

March is International Women's History Month, a time to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions women have made throughout history. Arguably nowhere is this more important than in jazz. Since the '30s, women have dominated the airwaves as jazz vocalists. Yet one can't help but wonder why legendary artists such as Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald composed so little—if at all. Perhaps it was due, in part, to a lack of visible role models. In the 19th century, authors Anne, Emily and Charlotte Brontë first published their novels under male pseudonyms in order to be taken seriously, and Jane Austen's early work was credited anonymously as being written "by a lady" (which was probably assumed to be a male pseudonym). Once the true identities of these writers were revealed, many more women were inspired to write—and today, over half of all published authors are women. Similarly, in jazz, women composers often disguised their gender by using male names or initials. Mary Lou Williams, initially published under M. L. Williams, knowing the assumption would be that the composer was male. While conditions are improving, there is still a long way to go when it comes to representation and role models—not helped by the fact that, according to a recent study by journalist, researcher and scholar Dr. Lara Pellegrinelli, just 15% of all jazz faculty and only 8% of instrumental jazz faculty in the US are women.

Congratulations to multiple GRAMMY-winner, singer and songwriter Samara Joy, who won the Best Jazz Vocal Album GRAMMY this year for *Portraits* (Verve).

And to the members of *säje* (vocalists Erin Bentlage, Sara Gazarek, Johnaye Kendrick and Amanda Taylor) who celebrated their third win (in as many years) for "Big Fish" in the Best Arrangement, Instruments and Vocals category. Songbook Ink has released a follow-up to 2024's *Flying High: Big Band Canaries Who Soared*. Its *Flying High: Still Soaring: A Tribute to the Voices That Taught the World to Swing* is a Women's History Month tribute to the big band "canaries" who toured during the Swing era, as well as to the contemporary artists carrying that legacy forward. The album features pianist-vocalist **Champion Fulton**, trumpeter-vocalist **Bria Skonberg**, who will be at Dizzy's Club (Mar. 20-22), vocalists **Tahira Clayton**, **Carmen Bradford**, and multiple GRAMMY-winner (and songwriter) **Nicole Zuraitis**, who won the 2024 Best Jazz Vocal GRAMMY for *How Love Begins*, a 10-song album featuring her original compositions, and who will be at The Jazz Loft (Mar. 27). The album release celebration at Birdland (Mar. 27-29) will feature **Champion Fulton**, **Imani Roussele** and **Laura Anglade**. Making her debut at Birdland, actress, singer and director, **Elizabeth Gillies**, celebrates the Great American Songbook (Mar. 9).

SEE YOU THERE...Second-generation American, GRAMMY-nominated vocalist and composer **Somi** (born in Illinois to parents from Rwanda and Uganda), a highly imaginative and soulful singer, returns to Dizzy's Club (Mar. 6-8), for the second installment of the Mother Africa Salon, a deeply personal look at how African sound, story and tradition flow through jazz. Expect a mix of original music and reimagined classics. Also at Dizzy's (Mar. 10), don't miss **Georgia Heers**, third place winner in 2024's Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Competition, blessed with a beautiful voice and a deep understanding of jazz. More don't-misses at Dizzy's this month: **Vanisha Gould** (Mar. 16), whose latest album, *She's Not Shiny, She's Not Smooth* (La Reserve) is

a wonderful celebration of vulnerability, imperfection and authenticity. Latin GRAMMY-nominated vocalist, composer and bandleader, **Claudia Acuña** returns with a magical blend of South American folk traditions with jazz and world music (Mar. 19). Lovers of straight-ahead jazz should make sure to catch **Judy Carmichael** (nicknamed "Stride" by Count Basie), who will delve into favorites from Gershwin, Fats Waller, Cole Porter and more (Mar. 24). **Shelley Nicole** brings her Abbey Lincoln tribute, "The Tao of Abbey Lincoln" to Nublu (Mar. 31). At Birdland, guitarist-vocalist **John Pizzarelli** (Mar. 3-7), **Kurt Elling**, with the Future of the Jazz Orchestra (Mar. 18-21). At Mezzrow: **Deborah Davis** (Mar. 12), **Michelle Walker** (Mar. 15), **Naama** (Mar. 15), **Pucci Amanda Jones** (Mar. 26) and Brazil-born, NY-based **Jamile** (Mar. 8), who will hopefully be singing selections from her beautiful new album *Pursuit of a Pulse* (Cellar Music). At the Jazz Forum: **Kate Baker** (Mar. 8), **Camille Thurman** (Mar. 13-14) and GRAMMY-nominee **Karrin Allyson** (Mar. 27-28). At Arthur's Tavern, the emotionally resonant **Richard Cortez** (Mar. 9, 23). At Zinc Bar: 2022 Ella Fitzgerald Jazz Vocal Competition winner, **Julia Danielle** (Mar. 3), pianist-vocalist **Kelly Green** (Mar. 10), **Kieran Brown** (Mar. 18), **April Varner** (Mar. 23) and **Champion Fulton** (Mar. 24). **Meshell Ndegeocello** and her group will perform at Pioneer Works (Mar. 29). Jazz vocalist and NEA Jazz Master **Dee Dee Bridgewater** performs at Schomburg Center's Women in Jazz Festival (Mar. 30) and will be honored with the ASCAP-Bob Harrington Lifetime Achievement Award at the 41st Bistro Awards at Chelsea Table + Stage (Mar. 16). Vocalist and composer **Aubrey Johnson** celebrates her latest album *The Lively Air* (Greenleaf Music) at Birdland (Mar. 22). And the highly-imaginative vocalist-improviser-composer, **Kyoko Kitamura** appears at Downtown Music Gallery (Mar. 24).