



JOCELYN GOULD

PERSONIFICATION OF DETERMINATION

BY SYLVIA LEVINE

The mainstream Canadian jazz guitarist-vocalist Jocelyn Gould has made a name for herself in a seemingly short time, bursting upon the scene as a Benedetto artist and head of the guitar program at Toronto's Humber College (from 2019-2024). Her prodigious chops and easy fluency with mainstream jazz of the '50s and '60s era has heralded a bright future, and it appears that she is fulfilling these early expectations—performing across North America, Europe and Japan, often in quartet, and increasingly accompanying her guitar playing with vocals.

About her career thus far, Gould recalls growing up in Winnipeg, Canada, in a family saturated in music—her father was an elementary school music teacher and amateur guitarist, while her mother and older brother were also amateur guitarists. “Whatever talent I have, I think I got from my dad—from his knowledge and his ear. But as I grow older, I realize that whatever soulfulness I have, that passion for music and the guitar, came from my mom.” Plus, she was driven to get better at the instrument through competitiveness with her rock-leaning, guitarist brother. “When I was 13, he showed me how to play power chords, a simple rock voicing, and I asked him how long would I have to practice to be as good as him. I’ll never forget what he said: ‘Forget it. Practice all you want but you’ll never be as good as me.’ So I took that very seriously and I am still competing with him on some level!”

Gould attended the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg and then received her master’s degree from Michigan State University in 2018, where many of her formative musical connections took place. Faculty member, trombonist Michael Dease introduced Gould to Posi-Tone Records founder and owner Marc Free, who would release her first recording as a leader, *Elegant Traveler* (Posi-Tone, 2019), along with Dease and fellow Michigan Staters, trumpeter Anthony Stanco and bassist George DeLancey. Also appearing are drummer Quincy Davis, one of Gould’s professors at the University of Manitoba, tenor saxophonist Brandon Wright and pianist Addison Frei, both of whom she met during a brief stay in NYC. That auspicious debut album won her a JUNO award, Canada’s GRAMMY equivalent.

Dease continues to be a fan, friend and collaborator of Gould’s: “Jocelyn brings a focused energy to the music that is both infectious and inspiring. I admire her soulful, authentic approach to playing jazz guitar.” Dease also observes that the guitarist’s improvisations and comping reveal a bright, optimistic spirit derived from her influences, especially guitar legend Wes Montgomery. “Her level of attention to the depth of emotion that jazz presents is profound,” he adds, setting her apart from her peers. Gould also plays and sings on Dease’s Roy Hargrove tribute album, *Grove’s Groove*. “Her two features are my favorites of the album,” he says.

It was Quincy Davis who recommended Gould to the Associate Head of Jazz Studies at MSU, guitarist Randy Napoleon. Napoleon enthuses about his former

pupil and friend: “Jocelyn is the personification of determination. When Quincy was still teaching up in Manitoba, he called me. Quincy is a no BS kind of guy. He said, ‘I have a student for you; she isn’t yet killing but she will be (and) she will be your favorite student.’ He was right on all counts.” The sponge-like Gould would record her lessons with Napoleon, who soon recognized her as a sister in the pursuit of this music. In his words: “direct and sincere with a commitment to authenticity.” He subsequently invited Gould to record with him too, as a member of his five-guitar choir featured on last year’s *Waking Dream* (OA2).

The LA-based Free remembers his enthusiasm on first hearing her play. “She is an incredibly talented guitar player and improviser,” he says, “who plays with feeling and commitment.” Having done his share of recording with Michigan Staters, Free notes they each have fit the label’s mission to showcase new and emerging artists—ones who pass the ear test. “I like to help them learn how to get their act together professionally, A&R, work with their sound, that kind of thing,” he says. “So that first album did very well. I am very proud of that.” But Posi-Tone’s brand is entirely instrumental and when Gould wanted to incorporate her vocals on subsequent recordings, they parted ways. Her next four recordings, self-produced and released on her own label, would feature her vocals on many of the tracks.

“Singing is a different path for me,” Gould explains. “I haven’t studied formally, but from childhood I have always sung. I stopped for several years while studying guitar. But it is important to me.” Singing is kind of vulnerable on a whole other level, she discloses, reasoning that as she grew older it was a path to follow, to just do it and love it. When her trio opened for guitarist Russell Malone (1963-2024) in Winnipeg, and again when he came to Michigan State for a week, she was encouraged by him to sing. As she points out, “in central Canada we have Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, all these great singer-songwriter-guitarists. So Malone’s mentorship was pretty important.” Drawn to the Great American Songbook, her performances and recordings include much of that material, music from the '50s and '60s, in addition to her own compositions, which often owe more than a passing nod to that era.

For her newest self-released quartet album, *Portrait of Right Now* (2024), Gould gathered a tight band consisting of all Winnipeg colleagues who got together to record the album in a single day. The title tune, a Gould original, has a strong Thelonious Monk flavor, her solo ending appropriately with a quote from his “Eronel”. The Rodgers and Hart standard “Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered” is an effective showcase for the leader’s guitar chord playing, the band arrangement echoing Ella Fitzgerald’s mid '50s recordings. The guitarist also pays tribute to her primary influence Montgomery in a personal tribute and close rendition of his “Jingles”.

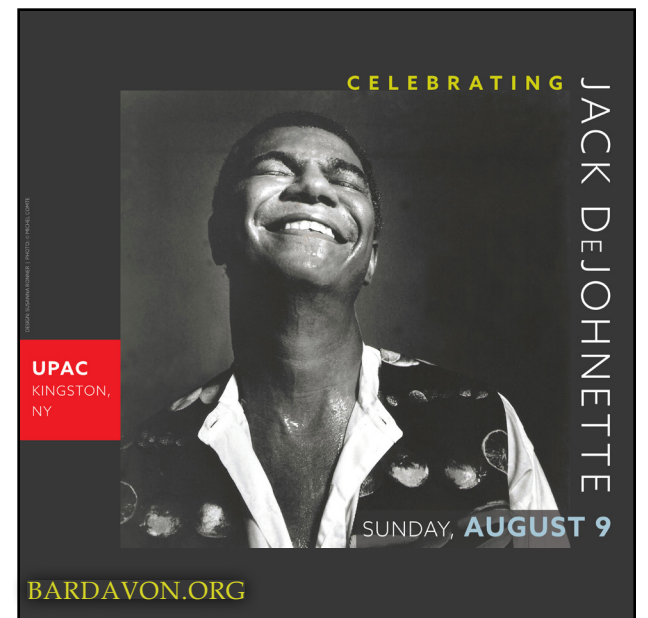
As Napoleon concludes of Gould: “She isn’t showy.

(She) is a very classy, intelligent and soulful player (and) her voice continues to become more focused as the years go on. We haven’t found her limits yet!”

For more info visit jocelyngould.com. Gould is Birdland Theater Aug. 21-23. See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Jocelyn Gould — *Elegant Traveler* (Posi-Tone, 2019)
- Jocelyn Gould — *Golden Hour* (s/r, 2021)
- Jocelyn Gould — *Sonic Bouquet* (s/r, 2022)
- Michael Dease — *Grove’s Groove* (Le Coq, 2022)
- Jocelyn Gould — *Portrait of Right Now* (s/r, 2024)
- Jocelyn Gould — *Solo* (s/r, 2025)



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