

## **Jazz vocalist Jenny Evans's 40<sup>th</sup> Jazz Jubilee** **“And each song becomes my own”**

*You were born in London but have been living in Munich, Germany for forty years now. When you were at school in England you not only sang with the school choir but also with the London Heinrich Schuetz Choir. And your piano teacher was the renowned harpsichordist Trevor Pinnock*  
Even as a little girl I was always the first one to put her hand up when there was a solo, the first one to recite a poem. I was in the school drama group and was lucky to have tremendous music teachers. I used to go to the art studio after school to paint and my art teacher played her own records – Early Music. They opened up a new world for me and I fell in love with that music.

*How did you get into the jazz vein, then?*

My Dad was a real rock 'n roll and jive fan, loved *Louis Jordan And His Tympani Five* – so when I started singing jazz I knew his tune *Cal'donia* off by heart. We didn't have any of *his* LPs but we did have Sinatra's LP with Count Basie and *Ella In Berlin*. I didn't know it was jazz at the time but I loved the music. My older brother also had lots of blues artists and of course, The Stones and The Beatles and I listened to them very astutely. My record collection was only music of the Middle Ages and Early Baroque.

*So you didn't sing jazz until you arrived in Munich?*

I came to Munich as an au-pair and, as one did in the 1970s, spent most of my evenings in bars with live music. Then I got to know a jazz bass player. At that time I was singing with the University Choir and when one of the bands he played with were looking for a singer he suggested me. So I got up and sang. I think the musicians were very surprised that I knew all the lyrics and what an 8 bar intro was.

*What was the music scene in Munich like in the 1970s?*

There was music everywhere. In Schwabing Munich's Quartier Latin alone there were six pubs with live music – let alone other parts of Munich. Then, of course, there were the discotheques – things were really cooking; a discotheque on every corner.

*You weren't interested in pop music, though?*

You couldn't get away from it. Munich groups like *The Silver Convention* and their “Fly Robin Fly” may have a their claim to fame in the history of music but how can you write or sing something sensible about a robin? At Christmas possibly.

*Lyrics are very important for you, then?*

Vocalists don't just interpret the melody they can also give their own rendition of the lyrics. Both are incredibly important for me. We jazz artists can open up new spheres in both the changes and the melody. You can't change standard lyrics but still you can still make songs like “Bye Bye Blackbird” and even “Happy Birthday”, neither of which have particularly meaningful lyrics, interesting for an audience. Singers and instrumentalists as, well, can build up tension in a song and also relax it. In German the word “Dramaturgie” describes this and it can be used to direct a set, a concert and also a song.

*You are not only a singer but also an actress. Has this influenced your music?*

Very much so. Even when I was little I loved having an audience. My parents were friends with a celebrated actor and his wife. Their youngest son was my first “victim” when I tried my hand as a director – he's an actor himself now!

As I mentioned, I stumbled into the role of jazz singer. I think that my love of the stage and my being a trooper definitely gave me a stage presence and I was able to get into the jazz scene fairly quickly.

*A singer should always be authentic?*

Yes, absolutely. The jazz press describes particularly my ballads as especially poignant. The song *Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most* is beautifully manic depressive. And that's where my acting ability comes in handy. *I'm* not depressive. Maybe manic but not depressive! As an actress I can get into a role. I could act the part of a murderess but wouldn't have to kill someone to get into the role. Being love lorn lies at the heart of many songs – I've never suffered myself but I can feel for someone who has.

*Singing the blues isn't your thing, though?*

The blues is such a vast domain, just like the term “jazz”. Singing in a bluesy way lends itself to some songs, some renditions. The lyrics are always important.

*You started singing in clubs in the 1970s. What happened then?*

It was funny: I had my first gig in the Munich club *Memoland* in Schwabing. The club owner said he'd booked a sextet – he couldn't pay for another musician. Every band member gave me 5 Deutsch Marks. Pity, it wasn't a big band!

But I was a perfectionist, wanted more than amateur trad jazz and founded my own band with what could be described as swinging entertainment. The Scottish trumpeter George Burt joined us and then things really hit off. He came to Munich with the *Pasadena Roof Orchestra* and wrote front-line arrangements for trumpet and sax. He came up with the name “Old Socks New Shoes” – it had nothing to do with smelly washing but meant old socks or tunes with new arrangements. I learned a lot from him and gave my penchant for show-biz the final touch.

We played regularly in all the Munich clubs and the ex-owner of the discotheque *P1* heard me and invited me to sing with the drum icon Freddie Brocksieper at his Sunday swing concerts. It was with him that I started working with head arrangements and singing jazz standards off the cuff.

*And did you sing in the famous Munich jazz club Domicile?*

I don't think my music was intellectual enough. Freddie Brocksieper once said to me, I shouldn't be so cheerful on stage – they were playing Cool Jazz! I remember when the American drummer Art Taylor sat in in my club *Jenny's Place* he gave me his book “Notes And Tones”. Amongst other things he'd asked famous jazz musicians “who do you play for?” I was surprised when all of the musicians apart from Nina Simone and Errol Garner said “for myself and the band”. It wasn't until ten years or so later that I understood that. The audience is important for me but, after all, I want to sing up to my own standards - and they are high.

*The little bar Jenny's Place became an institution in Schwabing. How did you, as a singer, get to open your own jazz club?*

Really by accident. As I mentioned I was together with the owner of the P1 and he had the opportunity to take over a tiny bar in Munich-Schwabing. He was an absolute music fan and it was his dream that Jenny should sing in Las Vegas in a show like his hero Frank Sinatra. A friend told him he should call the club *Jenny's Place* and put a piano in it. The show in Las Vegas never happened but *Jenny's Place* soon became an sought after club.

In the 1980s nearly all the clubs closed at 1 am. We were licensed till 3 am and I chose all my favourite musicians to play there. First of all, only pianists then I started booking trios and quartets. The club was so small that the drips from trombonists' instruments fell on the tables of the front row! *Jenny's Place* soon became the place where all visiting musicians came after their gigs. So nearly every evening there was a jam session.

*Was Jenny's Place important for your career?*

In the early 80s I was “the English singer” but my name became well-known with *Jenny's Place* - they said, oh, you're Jenny from *Jenny's Place*! I was also giving concerts in other places at the time

but when arrived in the club the next day guests told me, we were here but you weren't so we left. So, I always came to the club after my other gigs and the audience applauded. But, I don't think it went to my head. In England if you say you're a musician people ask you, and how do you earn your living? If you're an actor it's the same. Then they ask, and what do you do during the day?

*The club became one of the "in places".*

Yes. I hung our programme out on the notice board of the Munich theatre *Deutsches Theater* where a lot of touring shows are put on and the musicians and singers came and sat in after their gig. So I got to know many excellent musicians. It was also good as it was my rehearsal room during the day - and in the evenings in front of an audience. Where else can a singer sing from the Real Vocal Book propped on the piano if not in her own club?

Not only musicians came to the club but journalists, lawyers, people from film and theatre, even doctors who wanted to have a night cap before turning in. And jazz fans, of course. The club became an insiders' tip. The press wrote about, above all men's magazines like *Gentleman's Quarterly*, *Lui* and *Playboy*. But lots of women came in, as well, alone or in a group, and they became regular guests.

*Jenny's Place was very much linked to you as an individual.*

For me all I was doing was singing and making people feel at home. I never thought of myself as a jazz vocalist, that's what the jazz media started calling me. I just called myself a singer. But the marvellous thing about jazz is that you can make every song your own. A television producer saw me in the two-hander play "Educating Rita" that I acted in shortly before *Jenny's Place* opened and later he came to club. I was just singing that marvellous ballad *Send In The Clowns*. It's always been my aim to move the audience: to smile, to dance and also to tears and I saw that tears come to his eyes. He became a regular customer and later he said to me, hey we could use your club as a location for an episode of the popular German detective series *Schimanski*. Maybe there'd be a role for you in it. The director and the composer came to the club and I got the female lead acting the part of a singer who runs a club called *Jenny's Place*! The composer also wrote me a lovely ballad called *Jenny's Place* and asked me to write lyrics. They came to me very quickly. I recorded it on my live CD *Girl Talk*. When the episode was broadcast seventeen and a half million people watched it! That really did something for my kudos. And I still get the royalties when the episode is broadcast worldwide.

*Why did you close the club?*

After five years I realised there was more to my career than singing every day in one's own club. I enjoyed the time but when I got a role in the renowned theatre *Deutsches Schauspielhaus* in Hamburg, I closed the club. Many people wanted to open one with me as the figure-head but I'd had enough.

*Since then you've released ten jazz CDs. In 2004 with your CD "Nuages" you left the mainstream. How did that come to pass?*

My first love has always been the Early Baroque and classical music. As I started looking for songs in the Munich Music Library I thought, why not a CD solely with music by European composers. *Nuages* received very good reviews and a prize from the German Association of Critics. I was very glad, as it showed me that I was on the right path with my music. Since then I always include songs based on classical music or on folk songs when I record a new CD. And every song becomes my own. On my live CD *Gonna Go Fishin'* I included Rabih Abou Khalil's Happy Sheik. It's beautifully oriental.

*You're an acclaimed lyricist. How do you write your lyrics?*

I'm a real fan of the written word - at the moment I'm working on two novels - I love writing. When

I write lyrics the *music* is always my muse. If a composer sends me a tune to add lyrics to and if I don't find a base for the song in a short time at the beginning or the end of a passage in the music I give up. The music must move me.

*Your first record was "Whisper Not". That's when you first started collaborating with the music manager and drummer Rudi Martini. How did that happen?*

I really wanted to record a jazz record and the bass player Wolfgang Schmid said, I should talk to Rudi – he'd worked for years in the record business, first with *WEA* and then with *Global Music*. He was already a regular in *Jenny's Place* and I asked if he would help. He then produced the record and then offered it to the record company of the band leader Peter Herbolzheimer. That's how the whole thing started – on a private basis, as well. We married in 1999 and, apart from the last two, he produced all my CDs. But he 2009 developed Alzheimers and passed away in 2015. But from him I learned to keep my standards high and producing the CD *Be What You Want To* that I dedicated to him, he was always at my side. I'd like him to be proud of me.

*In 2014 you celebrated your 40<sup>th</sup> jazz jubilee. Do you every think of retiring?*

No way! My voice spectrum is broader than when I started and I can use every nuance available. The great thing with jazz or any other art form is that the older you get the more you can integrate what you have learned, what you've experienced in your work. As long as my voice is up to it I'll carry on. It's my life.