

DEBBIE PORYES BIO Updated Oct 2017

Debbie Poryes's music is powerful with a warm sophistication. Her highly original compositions are influenced by jazz from bebop to post-bop to modern times, as well as by 20th-century classical music and free jazz. Her voicings, melodies and touch are exquisite. Her sense of time and swing are deeply felt, and yet she can also be light hearted.

“Poryes is an inventive pianist, taking familiar standards and setting them slightly askew to re-examine them. Poryes's originals are varied in their moods and effects, serene... powerful... admirable.” Cadence Magazine

“Debbie Poryes's infectious gifts as an abundantly creative jazz pianist-composer-arranger point out her distinctive identity among the huge crowd of excellent pianists. Easily perceptible is her genuine, spirited exuberance for the music, the piano, and the open interaction with her bandmates -- a standout quality of her engagingly personal and musical personality. Impressive, too, is how her swinging joyousness articulates every note she plays.” Herb Wong, jazz critic

Born in Santa Monica, California, Debbie found herself at the piano when she was five, practicing everything from Chopin to show tunes. Playing led to fascination with musical theory and structure, then jazz standards, composing, and improvising. Hearing Monk and Miles as a teenager, she fell in love with their music and decided to become a jazz pianist. A student on full scholarship at the University of California at Berkeley, she decided to stop going to school so that she could be a full-time professional jazz musician. At twenty, her first regular paying gig lasted a year at a Berkeley restaurant, playing five nights a week from 5 p.m. to midnight.

Debbie has always gone her own way musically, even while maintaining a constant study through transcription and analysis of her favorite players and composers, such as Bill Evans, Wayne Shorter, Keith Jarrett, Horace Silver, Hank Jones, Sonny Clark, and Clare Fischer. Drawn strongly to 20th century classical music, she has been influenced by many composers, such as Aaron Copland and Norman Dello Joio. In her early years as a musician in Oakland, her passion led her to play frequently at jam sessions while continuing to study classical music

and jazz with local players. She composed and arranged music, and produced her own concerts with her duos, trios and quartets in addition to freelancing with various local singers and bands. She has since headlined all over the San Francisco Bay Area including Yoshi's Jazzclub, the Berkeley Jazzschool, the Healdsburg Jazz Festival, and the Piedmont Piano Company.

The 1980s saw Debbie earning a teaching credential in Jazz Studies and becoming fluent in Dutch while teaching jazz in the Netherlands as a tenured faculty member at conservatories in Hilversum and Arnhem. Her students loved her sunny California disposition, sense of humor and encouraging manner. She toured Europe as a leader of her own trios and quartets, performing at festivals and clubs in The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, England, and France, including The Bim House and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, New Morning in Paris, and Quasimodo in Berlin.

While living in Europe she recorded a trio LP for Timeless Records. German and Dutch jazz reviews for that LP referred to her playing as "crystal clear" and "with the swinging elegance of Tommy Flanagan combined with the depth of Bill Evans." She arranged for, accompanied, and recorded with numerous singers as well as freelancing with other groups, including an eleven-piece band led by bassist John Clayton, Brazilian bands, and free improvisation groups. She composed soundtracks for a Dutch documentary film company. Then in 1990 as a well-seasoned and traveled musician, she returned to the United States to get married and raise her daughter.

An interesting aspect to Debbie's musical life has been her long-time struggle with tendonitis in her wrists, temporarily solved with lots of aspirin. In her thirties, intense pain forced her to stop playing for two years, during which time she explored many avenues of healing. A breakthrough came when she happened upon Dorothy Taubman's piano technique in New York City, which emphasized the natural anatomy of the fingers, hand, and arm. Absorbing this new way of thinking, Debbie continues to study it and pass it along to her grateful students. The injury turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it led not only to Debbie's development of beautiful sonority without harshness, but also an ease and control she didn't have before. One has only to see Debbie play to appreciate how comfortable her hands are at the keyboard.

In addition to her latest 2017 trio CD, *Loving Hank*, Debbie has released three CDs as a leader: *A Song in Jazz* with her trio (Jazzschool), *Catch Your Breath* with her quartet (Origin/OA2), and *Two and Fro* duo with Bruce Williamson (Origin/OA2). All the recordings have received outstanding reviews and sold copies across the country as well as in Japan, Australia, and England. Jazz Chicago wrote, "Poryes's playing is confident, playful, thoughtful, and full of life." All About Jazz exclaimed, "a knockout listening experience" and "Poryes colors outside the lines, plays to challenge and compel, but never forgets to entertain." All Music Guide calls Debbie's playing, "infectious, dramatic, spirited, and shimmering." The Jazz Weekly in LA describes *Loving Hank* as "relaxed, elegant, subtle and charming." Andrew Gilbert of the Berkeleyside calls it "radiant."

Debbie felt the call to teach early in her career and continues to adore helping students understand jazz and further their own playing. Debbie has internet students around the globe and a waiting list for her private practice. Besides regular teaching at the Berkeley Jazzschool, she's taught many years at the Stanford Summer Jazz Program, the Lafayette Summer Jazz Workshop and given presentations to the California Music Teachers' Association on how to teach jazz. Recently her 6-year-long gig playing solo piano twice-weekly at the New Orleans styled Oakland restaurant Pican, ended when the restaurant up and closed! Ah well, it was a great run and Debbie loved it. But even though she misses the fried chicken and excellent Manhattans, she can now concentrate her energies on her trio and other projects and the release of *Loving Hank*!