

## Brenda Earle Stokes Bio

Jazz pianist and singer Brenda Earle Stokes' career is a testament to Emerson's idea that life is a journey, not a destination. Stokes has fused a passion for the piano and a love of singing into a vibrant career that spans genres easily. With her new album, *Right About Now*, she's found a balance between her two instruments and very personal place from which to tell stories.

"This album is a set of 12 songs that create a snapshot of different stories in my life," Brenda said. "It's six original tunes, two existing instrumental songs that I wrote lyrics to, and four covers that spoke to me. All this music is extremely personal to me, but it also touches on issues that relate to a wider audience. It's all coming from a place in me that's as personal as I've ever gotten before."

Brenda's career has taken her across Canada and US, and internationally performing at venues like the Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, the Toronto Jazz festival, Avery Fischer Hall and the Christchurch Arts Festival in New Zealand and has performed with such artists at Wycliffe Gordon, Donny McCaslin, the DIVA Jazz Orchestra and Maurice Hines. Brenda has performed professionally as a classical vocalist, pianist and choral conductor, performing in pop bands, as a solo singer-pianist and as Musical Director of Off-Broadway productions, which has shaped both her musicianship and her artistic output.

A native of a Sarnia, Ontario, Canada, Brenda grew up listening to her father's old 45s which consisted of everything from Little Richard to Twisted Sister. "Looking back, I realize just how random all of that music was in relation to each other. To me, it seemed normal to hear all of these different sounds together." Her early life was shaped by the death of her mother from breast cancer when Brenda was eight years old. She and her brother, jazz bassist Graig Earle, were raised by her father. "I think an undercurrent of my entire life and music is needing to have a deeper expression for a lot of the conflicting feelings that I was having at that time of my life," Stokes said

Brenda did all the usual musical things -- she took piano lessons starting around age 4, then added clarinet in school. Hearing Oscar Peterson for the first time at age fifteen prompted an immediate shift to jazz. After focusing on jazz piano at York University in Toronto, Brenda ventured to the Banff Center for the Arts for a month long jazz residency in the mountains. It was there that she first performed as a vocalist, a huge step for her as an artist. "I really wanted to be taken seriously as a jazz pianist and I didn't want anything to take away from that. When I stood up and sang for the first time at Banff, it felt to liberating to me that I knew there was no going back."

After a few years of gigging around Toronto, Brenda sought adventure working in a singalong piano bar on cruise ships in the Caribbean. She took those proceeds and headed for New York City, where she planned to study and immerse herself in the jazz scene. She ended up at Manhattan School of Music, working on her Master's degree in jazz piano and voice. "One of the first people I met in New York City was saxophonist Joel Frahm, who was a great friend, inspiration and supporter of my work." Brenda went into the studio with Joel and his

band and recorded her next album *Happening*, which documents her early experiences living in New York and her fresh new perspective as a composer.

Her 2009 release *Songs For A New Day* was a compilation of original material and garnered international critical acclaim for her work as a pianist and vocalist.

Brenda is committed to her work in education and has served on the faculties of Fordham University, the Brooklyn Youth Chorus and the New York Pops Education Program. She has given workshops and masterclasses at high schools and colleges internationally, and is certified in vocal pedagogy. She is very proud of her long association with the New York Ronald McDonald House, where she gives music instruction to children who are being treated for serious illnesses.

In recent years, her life has shifted again. Brenda got married and had a son. She says being a mother has caused her to appreciate her time more and to use the time she has more skillfully. Even more than that, being a mother makes her realize the kind of example she wants to set for her son.

“I really want him to be able to find his passion and his bliss, so I feel like that’s part of this, too. I want to be my authentic self and take risks. So this is really me, jumping wholeheartedly into something.”

Brenda will be touring the US, Canada, New Zealand and Scandinavia in support of *Right About Now*. She continues to write music, to refine her craft, and to learn how to balance the various sides of her musical personality. And most importantly, she continues to prove that life is about the journey.