



Brenda Earle Stokes, BFA, M.Mus.

Pianist. Vocalist. Composer. Educator

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Brenda Earle Stokes is a pianist, vocalist and composer based in NYC. A natural multitasker, Stokes has fused a passion for the piano and a love of singing into a vibrant career that crosses genres organically. Although her playing is rooted in the history of jazz from Bill Evans to Bud Powell, she draws inspiration from Brazilian music, musical theater as well as pop artists Carole King and Elvis Costello. Her unique brand of humor and honesty, mixed with her virtuosic piano and fluid vocal chops make her a favorite among audiences.

Originally from Sarnia, Ontario Canada, Brenda's early years were shaped by her classical piano training and by playing clarinet in concert band. "The solace I felt playing piano alone was really brought to life by playing in an ensemble. Even though I loved music and the piano, it never felt like the best fit." A high school band director played an Oscar Peterson recording and it was love at first listen. This small-town girl was going to be a jazz musician.

A five-year stint in Toronto to go to York University, was followed by several contracts as a cruise ship singer/pianist. "I was such a straight-ahead jazz musician, and suddenly I was faced with playing pop music and taking requests all night long. I got to really get inside the world of pop music and live and breathe so much music that I had ignored during my jazz training." After three-year stint doing singing piano bar gigs on cruise ships, Brenda came to NYC with a new sense of confidence as a performer, and an earful of new sounds as a composer and songwriter.

Brenda has performed with a huge array of performers including Wycliffe Gordon, Dick Oatts, Joel Frahm, David Liebman, the DIVA Jazz Orchestra, Ann Hampton Calloway and Maurice Hines. She has toured internationally and performed at Carnegie Hall, Avery Fischer Hall, the Christchurch Arts Festival (New Zealand), the Toronto Jazz Festival and at

jazz clubs across Canada, the US, New Zealand and Australia. She has released four critically- acclaimed CDs as a leader, which feature her original compositions.

For her most recent release ***Right About Now***, Brenda partnered with legendary producer Matt Pierson on a project that fused her own compositions with jazz standards and few rewrites of pop songs by Pete Townshend and Canadian songwriting legend Ron Sexsmith. ***Right About Now*** was Brenda's most sophisticated project to date and it showed a true connection between her work as a composer/arranger and as a player.

In addition to an active performing career, Brenda is widely known as a top voice teacher and coach in New York City. A master vocal technician, her "day gig" as a voice teacher has dramatically altered her own approach to singing. "So many of my clients are music theater performers, which has really opened up my ears to the many different sounds that you just don't hear jazz singers using." Combine that with some classical voice training and a lot of rock and pop singing, and her ears and voice have expanded, opening up a color palette of sounds she is able to use. "Working with so many different singers has made me consider all the ways that sound can be made, which has really expanded my approach to my jazz singing. I really think about all of the available colors that my voice can make when I'm exploring new material."

Having slowed down her touring schedule over the past several years since her son was born, Brenda is starting to ramp up her performing life once again. "It felt right to cut back on my performing life so I could enjoy being around my family, but now feels very much like the right time to be back in the game." On the agenda for this year is preparing to record her sixth album – a full return to her jazz roots and her first trio offering.

"Once I had finished the cycle of touring for the ***Right About Now*** record, I started thinking about the artists who I studied in my early days as a jazz pianist." Oscar Peterson, Bud Powell, Tommy Flanagan, Carmen McRae and Shirley Horn were suddenly back in rotation on her CD Player. (old school!) She also started having a closer look at some of the music theater repertoire she was working on in her private studio, making connections between the history of the two. There are big things on the horizon in 2018. Stay tuned.

***"...a breezy delight."* -Time Out New York**