

Brenda Earle Stokes is a rare jazz artist with a true command of both the piano and the voice. As a follow-up to her critically acclaimed 2014 studio album *Right About Now*, Stokes sought to challenge herself to dig deep and share the full scope of her talents in the most intimate setting possible. In her latest album *Solo Sessions Volume 1*, Brenda explores the rarely-recorded format of solo piano/voice, showcasing her mesmerizing fluidity as both singer and pianist. Recorded in a single four-hour session in her hometown of Sarnia, Ontario, Canada, Brenda explores a wide spectrum of material, including jazz standards, original compositions and seldom-heard compositions by Dave Brubeck and Steve Swallow. She rounds out the recording with lush jazz arrangements of songs recorded by k.d. lang, Michael McDonald and Huey Lewis, showing the full range of her musical curiosities.

Brenda Earle Stokes is a surprisingly multifaceted musician, known for her work as a pianist, singer and composer. She has performed as a side person with John Riley, Dick Oatts, Joel Frahm, Roxy Coss, Wycliffe Gordon, Maurice Hines and the DIVA Jazz Orchestra. She has held residencies at the Kennedy Center and Banff Center for Fine Arts, was a finalist of the Mary Lou Williams Jazz Piano Competition and was a winner of the IAJE Sister's in Jazz competition, identifying her as one of the top emerging jazz artists of her generation. As a bandleader she has toured clubs and festivals across the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia and has released 6 albums on her own label.

Brenda Earle Stokes' musical curiosity has led her to professional work as a choral conductor, classical vocalist, church organist, off Broadway music director, early childhood music teacher and cruise ship piano bar entertainer. These seemingly unrelated musical experiences have helped develop her versatility and fluency as both pianist and vocalist. "While jazz is my first love, I feel passionate about making music in many different realms. Each musical experience influences what is available to me in my own performance life."

Brenda's musical life started at age 4, when her parents enrolled her in classical piano lessons. 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 so 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 sing-along piano bar on cruise ships in the Caribbean. "Taking requests 6 nights a week for several years was a deep education for me. Not only did I have to learn hundreds of songs, but I also had to learn how to hold an audience's attention and really engage people." She took the proceeds from that gig 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.

In 2014 Brenda collaborated with producer Matt Pierson to release *Right About Now*, a studio album which prominently featured her original compositions. "*Right About Now* was

such a huge project for me and really got me on the international stage. It is a project I am hugely proud of.”

In addition to her life as performer and composer, Brenda is active as an educator, serving on the faculty of Fordham University, running a busy private studio in New York City, and working as a guest clinician, adjudicator and speaker. She works extensively as a voice teacher coach, working with amateur and professional singers in jazz, pop and music theatre and teaching piano skills. She has taught for the Midori and Friends Foundation, developed curricular for the New York Pops Orchestra and arranged music and taught for the Grammy-winning Brooklyn Youth Chorus. Her online courses [Piano Skills for Singers](#) have hundreds of students worldwide.

Brenda Earle Stokes is active in outreach, having developed educational programming for the Midori and Friends Foundation, The New York Pops Kids in the Balcony program and holding a ten-year residency at the Ronald McDonald House in NYC. Brenda is passionate about activism and is a member of the Women in Jazz Organization (WIJO), helping to represent and empower women in the wider jazz community.