

Mp3 Elena Welch - Catnip Cafe



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Classic jazz and blues fully loaded with attitude and finesse. 13 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Jazz Vocals, BLUES: Blues Vocals Details: I was raised in a small town on the Spoon River, 5 hours southwest of Chicago, Illinois. My father, a fine artist, listened mostly to opera records and loved the Spanish classical guitar. I started sounding out melodies on the piano at age 4. I begged for lessons. This was not small request for a cash-strapped family of seven, but fortunately a way was found and I began classical piano lessons at age 5. My brother, Chico began playing guitar in high school. He was a natural musician who conquered string instruments one after the other, including the violin. I wasn't as naturally gifted instrumentally, but I did have the natural gift of a strong voice and love of performing. I was part of the chorus in grade school, high school and college. I was not a favorite of the teachers who continually moved me to the high soprano section-not because I had a high voice, but because my alto range boomed. Annoyed teachers continually moved me to the soprano section where my voice would "blend". As it turned out, my time in the soprano section was key in strengthening my voice and technique. During my teens, I was a featured guest at a few of my brother's performances and stumbled through blues and country spirituals at Chico's coffee house gigs. I moved to Chicago at age 18 to attend Loyola University. I was taken by the live jazz scene there. I was unfamiliar but captivated with this music style that flowed from every corner of the city at every hour of the day. In 1983, I studied abroad in Italy, majoring in fine and commercial arts. I hung with English guitarist and singer, Gary Howard, who fronted an Italian jazz band that performed the American standards. I discovered then that Jazz is truly an all-American art form. In Europe I met up with some insightful, confusing and cloudy issues of anti-American sentiment. I was grateful and proud that I could embrace the American tradition of Jazz with such simple and indisputable pleasure. I returned to Chicago with a purpose. I teamed up with the legendary bebop jazz pianist, Tommy Ponce. Together we

formed trios to sextets and worked the clubs and street festivals. My first full booking was Chicago's Argyle Street Festival. We were photographed and made headlines in the local paper. I was hooked. The band members were 30 years my senior. I was a hit with these serious bebop players mainly because I knew so few songs! I would be called up to do two songs per set and this exhausted my repertoire. The players were then free to stretch out and solo with minimal bother from the chick singer. Robert Barry, friend and the band's inspired jazz drummer, was the only member who showed when I requested rehearsals... Thanks Robert! I was a hit with audiences. Mainly because I was so fresh. I had never seen a jazz vocalist perform. I didn't know the elegant gestures and stance of the torch singers. I twisted and contorted like a rock and roll singer... this is all I knew. Tommy was an incredible influence and did buckle down to a few regular rehearsals. The guidance I received from Tommy is treasured. One pearl from Tommy I will always strive to uphold was his strict code of old-school stage etiquette. This includes an imperative graciousness and respect toward fellow entertainers sharing the stage and in the audience. Tommy had a flair for the bigger-than-life show-biz tradition -- an important perspective that he elegantly combined with truth and warmth. How do you become a jazz singer? I looked into schools. I switched majors from commercial art to music and theater and studied under the direction of William Russo (Stan Kenton's musical director in the '50s) at Columbia College. I befriended many jazz singers and looked for a common denominator in the respected jazz singers of Chicago... and then I discovered something: most had worked at Chicago's famed Gaslight Club. In 1986, I auditioned for the Gaslight Club of the Palmer House Hilton Chicago and worked as a "Gaslight Girl" for two years with master accompanist, Joey Iacco and memorable Gaslight trumpeter, Joe Kelly (among many others). Each Gaslight girl had a list of tunes that they "owned", and you couldn't do another girl's tune. I think it's finally safe to announce that many of those tunes "owned" by other Gaslight Girls are now in my permanent collection. After a shift at the Gaslight Club, a group of us would hang at the Old Town Ale House. There was an old man that would walk in nightly about 3 am with a stack of records. He was painfully selling off his entire collection one LP at a time. I was a regular customer and would venture out in the wee hours specifically to find "the man with the records". The man gave a loving and in-depth review of each LP. I gained some rare and out-of-print material from these exchanges. The source of much of my more obscure material can be traced to "the man with the records". The opening track of my new release, "The Jazz in You" was taken and restyled from an out-of-print Gloria Lynne LP purchased at that time. In 1988, I sang during the

breaks of blue humor comedian, Frank Penny, at the Domino Lounge. Yes... this was a strange gig. In 1989, I helped open the Underground Wonder Bar with good friend, fellow Gaslight Girl, wonderful singer/pianist, club owner, recording artist and mother of four -- Lonie Walker. A big highlight in this time period was when a friend booked me at Chicago's popular Halsted Street Festival. I immediately hired Lonie Walker and began forming a festival band: "The Lenacious Seven". The incredible sound at this outdoor festival was mastered by jazz guitarist and sound engineer, Michael Groh. The crowd literally rushed the stage and asked where they could see more of "The Lenacious Seven". I was not prepared! Fortunately, Lonie had cards from the Underground Wonderbar that were tossed into the crowd. I remember a cassette-recorded rehearsal at Lonie's house, in her glass, soundproof rehearsal room. When I replayed the tape I noticed that while Lonie was establishing harmony parts for the band, she was also instructing her son on the use of a double-boiler for German chocolate cake preparation, surveying another son as he cleaned the bird cage, and helping the house-sitter locate gardening tools. I felt I had Lonie's full attention during the rehearsal and these tidbits were unnoticed until the playback. This is my favorite Lonie Walker story (and there are many). I learned so much just by hanging out at Chicago jazz clubs and listening to and jamming with the local cats. Dave Shumacher, friend and exquisite baritone sax player, gave me two LPs, one featuring vocalist Abbey Lincoln and the other featuring vocalist Betty Carter. These records would become major influences. Two cuts from these LPs are featured on "Catnip Cafe". Thanks David! Neal Kristie, friend and cabaret singer extraordinaire, introduced me to jazz vocalist Anita O'Day. The tune "Four" is a tribute to Anita and to the late Mr. Kristie. Guitarist and friend, Michael Groh, had a day gig at the library and would check out the classic double-LP songbooks featuring Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughn for me. I would wear these thin and began incorporating the classics into my growing repertoire. Thanks Michael! In 1990 I moved to San Francisco. I recorded a demo with pianist Ken Zimmerman and trumpeter Graham Bruce (also featured on the new release, Catnip Cafe) at Diamond Audio in Noe Valley. I took a vocal workshop at Blue Bear Music School in the Marina. I sat in every Tuesday night at Paul Robinson's Workshop south of Market and met a tight-knit group of fellow singers and musicians. I gigged at small cafes and clubs in San Francisco. I experimented with the freedom of string accompaniment by working with accomplished guitarists, Michael Groh (Chicago friend) and Ned Boyton. Michael Groh helped me attain a major breakthrough by charting a huge portion of my repertoire. Thanks again, Michael! In 1994 there was a one-year stint with the Dave Galaxy Band (R&B).

The other chick singer (Sharon- amazing- screaming- blues- albino- girl) and I had "somewhat" coordinated moves and outfits and sang mostly backup to funky Dave Galaxy. This was a gas! Next, I worked with dynamite pianist, singer and friend, Eric Shifrin. I met Eric when he was fresh off of a cruise ship gig and new in San Francisco. I knew such a talent would be gigging steady in no time and rushed to take full advantage of his availability. Eric also helped out with what was a major breakthrough, getting a lot of my favorite out-of-print material officially charted from the old LPs. Thanks Eric! I also worked with soulful pianist and composer, John Rosenburg. (featured on the new release, "Catnip Cafe"). Together we gigged in small cafes in San Francisco. In 1994, I attended the Stanford Jazz Workshop and studied under the direction of world-renowned jazz vocalists, Madeline Eastman and Sheila Jordon. In 1998 I married my true love, gained a cool step-son and moved to Marin county. Here I met the likes of killer bassist, Chris Amberger (featured on the new release). From 1997-1999 I had an ongoing gig at Broadway 39 in Fairfax. I sang there until my 9th month of pregnancy with my first child, Sofia. In 1999 our growing family needed a home, and we relocated to the Russian River area. This was a big move and I feared it may be more difficult to indulge my passions for jazz and blues. I also feared that it would be difficult to find good musicians in "the boonies". Instead, I discovered a bustling community of jazz and blues artists and fans on the Russian River. I found a wonderful jazz club right in Guerneville, Main Street Station. I scored a regular gig there and sang in my 8th month of pregnancy with my second daughter, Zoe. I have also had the incredible pleasure of meeting and working with word-class, top-notch jazz musicians-- yes... in the boonies of Sonoma County: Bassist and vocalist, Nils Molin stopped me in my tracks-an amazing talent featured on Catnip Cafe. Other Sonoma monsters: Randy Vincent (featured), Chris Amberger (featured), Richard Heinburg (featured), John Simon, Tony De'Anna, Wayne DeLaCruz, Bob Rife, Steve Webber and Gary Digman, to name a few. We thought we may have to leave the Russian River Area last year. I felt that too many chapters had passed unrecorded, so I decided to make a CD and capture this wonderful time on the river! I hope this new release will capture you too. -Elena elenawelch.com/bio.htm

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