

Jeanie Brandes

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Kisses You Awake

On the opening track of *Kisses You Awake*, Jeanie Brandes' exquisite new collection celebrating the rich tapestry and enduring magic of the Great American Songbook, the savvy and sensual world class singer asks herself the simple question that legendary lyricists Marilyn and Alan Bergman penned long ago: "What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life?"

Working with and inspired by an incredibly creative jazz ensemble featuring bassist Brian Bromberg, her longtime pianist Shelly Markham, pianist Corey Allen, saxophonist/flutist Doug Webb and drummer Dave Tull, Brandes begins answering the question with 11 beautifully arranged, lushly produced tracks that fulfill her lifelong dream of making an honest and heartfelt jazz record.

Kisses You Awake caps an incredible and diverse musical career that has taken the singer all over the world—beginning at age 22 when she performed with a 30-piece orchestra. Over the years, she performed many shows with Henry Mancini, had notable engagements at top jazz/cabaret venues in New York, L.A. and the Caribbean, and has sung the national anthem numerous times for her favorite teams in her hometown of Houston (Astros, Oilers, Texans, Rockets) and her adopted home of Los Angeles (Lakers, Galaxy). Raving about one of Brandes' celebrated performances at Hollywood's Cinegrill, Entertainment Today said, "Her voice

is perfect for the material, and she is a highly trained singer with an impressive vocal range...left chills running down the spine. Brandes successfully channels the sensibility of a smoky white-tablecloth nightclub act into a smoke free, postmodern present."

Starting with a subtle, intimate "What Are You Doing..." and wrapping with the eloquent "Here's That Rainy Day," Brandes taps the catalogs of Marilyn & Alan Bergman, Gershwin, Mancini, Johnny Mercer, Rogers & Hart, Jerome Kern and others to create a rich emotional journey that dashes all cynicism and proves that sometimes, just maybe, love conquers all. When Brandes says, "I still believe in love and romance, and jazz offers a sensitive way of looking at romance," only someone living "A Day In The Life Of A Fool" would be disinclined to believe her.

Brandes' decision to take a warm and inviting jazz turn in her recording career comes after three critically acclaimed CD releases that featured many original songs: *Love In The World I Remember* (2000), which was released in conjunction with her bestselling book of poetry with the same name, now in its fourth printing; *Soul Serenity* (2002), which featured originals penned by Markham and a co-write by Brandes and Markham called "Sweet Celebration"; and a lovely children's album, *When I Look In Your Eyes* (2006), which features the classic "Never Neverland" and iconic title track written by

Leslie Bricusse. Besides the perfect mix of material and vibrant arrangements, the singer knew that the key to making *Kisses You Awake* a landmark recording was surrounding herself with the "best of the best" in the jazz world who could inspire her to reach new heights in her own artistry. She sees her brilliant team of veteran jazz musicians not as sidemen but as collaborators.

Another important element was the pure sound that emerged from the always shimmering behind the boards work of famed engineer and mixer Tom McCauley, who had worked on four songs from *Love In The World I Remember*. His credits include Bromberg, Manhattan Transfer, Joe Sample and The Duke Ellington Orchestra. Another of the noteworthy sonic touches was Brandes' gift from Paul Levy of Advanced Audio, an M49 Neumann mic that was last used by Barbra Streisand.

"*Kisses You Awake* is blessed with my brilliant musicians," she says. "They helped me express the joy in my soul and the passion in my heart. I am excited to have been part of the process of watching them nurture the best they have to offer so that I could give them the best I can be as well. We did it the old fashioned way, live and organically, getting most songs in only one or two takes. The solo Brian created on 'What Are You Doing...' was genius and made for a remarkable opening number. Shelly has been with me 15 years and was a true in-

spiration. His piano solo on 'Here's That Rainy Day' was textured with the most beautiful nuances. He guided me into lyrical intonations he knew I had from all of our years working together. And Tom is the best engineer and a joy to work with.

This project is the culmination of what I have always wanted to achieve as an artist and I found the most amazing men to do it with," Brandes adds. "I am humbled by this wonderful opportunity to shine and have this extraordinary experience because of them. Everyone was there for the right reasons. This was all about the guys leading me to get to do what singers like Ella Fitzgerald did, and I couldn't be happier with the results."

Although *Kisses You Awake* is the first Brandes recording to exclusively feature standards, its emotional resonance is due in part by the singer's unique ability as a songwriter herself to do the very thing that made Sinatra such an intuitive artist. It's a technique known as "turning the lyric." "It's a very interesting phenomenon in the jazz world that when people listen, they often think of the music first," she says. "But as a lyricist myself, I recognize that what legends like Sinatra did best was turn the lyric poetically so that his own life experiences were drawn into his interpretations of words written by others."

Brandes adds, "In recording this album, this was essential to me, to bring my life to the sessions so that I am telling a personal story in every song. A good example is 'Moon River,' which Mancini would whistle and play for me on piccolo flute. Another is Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's 'The Folks That Live On

The Hill,' a song about two older people looking back on their life, which I dedicate with love to my parents. My mom was a singer who brought light and love into my life, and my dad was a pediatrician who loved the symphony. They always brought new music into the house. They knew from the time I was five that I would also be a singer. I knew when I finally had the chance to do a jazz album, the most important thing was to express where I come from and reflect on my extraordinary life experiences."

Brandes does this with grace, class, wit and a warm and wonderful style all her own throughout *Kisses You Awake*, sharing musical snapshots of her journey via works by Marilyn & Alan Bergman ("What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life?" and "Like A Lover"), Luiz Bonfá ("A Day In The Life Of A Fool"), Cole Porter ("Night And Day"), Rodgers & Hart ("Where Or When"), Dori Caymmi and Marilyn & Alan Bergman ("Like A Lover"), Haven Gillespie/Fred Coots' "You Go To My Head," Mancini and Mercer ("Moon River"), Guy Wood/Robert Mellin ("My One And Only Love"), Johnny Burke/Jimmy Van Heusen ("Here's That Rainy Day") and an extraordinary medley of "The Party's Over/One For My Baby."

Musically, Brandes' journey has long involved encounters with great jazz musicians, from popular urban jazz saxmen Kirk Whalum and Everette Harp in her native Houston in the 80s to Wynton Marsalis during the 12 years she lived and performed in New York. Yet as she tells it, she developed her love for jazz late, some years after studying voice at Indiana University. A professional vocalist

since she was eleven, she's sung everything from opera to musical theatre and even coached students from Juilliard.

Brandes' impressive array of talents extends beyond music to encompass many multi-media ventures. In addition to her bestselling poetry book, she has worked extensively in the voiceover field and has appeared in over one hundred national spots. In addition to writing for several high profile sitcoms, she has been a guest on "CBS: The Morning Show" and "PBS: Late Night Edition" and for several years hosted her own syndicated TV show, "Women's World with Jeanie Brandes." Her wide range of legendary interview subjects reflects a multitude of personal passions: Arthur Miller, Walter Cronkite, Henry Mancini, Leonard Bernstein, Philip Glass, Beverly Sills, Beatrice Arthur, Geena Davis, Alec Baldwin, Farrah Fawcett and Jaclyn Smith.

Her resume up till now is impressive, but these days, nothing makes Jeanie Brandes happier than realizing that she's finally living her jazz dreams with the release of *Kisses You Awake*. "This project was all about a labor of love," she says, "bringing people together who are classy, non-egotistical and instinctively knew how to help me take my career to the next level. In the studio, it's all about being comfortable and sharing the joy with those around you. The whole time, I felt like I was in love with ten men at the same time."

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