



## LYNNE JORDAN

In a city (Chicago) brimming with classic blues and jazz divas, Lynne Jordan stands apart. Not only do her soaring vocals dip effortlessly into blues, jazz, funk, rock and even country but her bawdy personality wins over any crowd. Her talent so dazzled the Second City that the late Chicago film critic Roger Ebert declared her his "favorite diva." Backed by her sizzling band The Shivers, Jordan quickly developed into a Chicago institution, playing jazz and blues clubs, swanky lounges and even the charity circuit throughout the country. She brought her special brand of storytelling, raw humor and performance to New York and Atlanta with her sold-out show, *A Musical Tribute to Nina Simone*.

Growing up in Dayton Ohio, Jordan came from a family of church-going singers who encouraged humility. She down-played her big voice until she was singled out to star in school musicals. Arriving in Chicago to study at Northwestern University, Jordan promptly changed her major from journalism to theater and has been performing non-stop ever since. She performed as an Arts Ambassador representing the City of Chicago in Moscow and Kyiv and has graced stages throughout Europe and South America and is currently featured in the Jazz Opera, *Don't Worry, Be HaRpy* by French composer Isabelle Olivier. The show returned to Paris for a third tour in June 2016. She has released two CDs to date and is featured on recordings by Tom Waits, Urge Overkill and several compilations, most notably a tribute to Janis Joplin: *Blues Down Deep: Songs of Janis Joplin* which also featured Etta James, Otis Clay, Taj Mahal & Koko Taylor.

"For so long, I was told to nail my music to a genre or language, and like [Nina], I never did. I will sing in English, French, Hebrew or Japanese. It's the song and the story that matters."

Lynne has written a one woman show: "A Great Big Diva" about her life and her experiences out there in show business.

### HOW DID YOU START IN MUSIC?

I started singing in choir as a child, but was always too shy to sing out. In high school I starred in musicals, but upon graduation I wanted to be a journalist and pushed music aside. Then a friend pushed me onto the stage and I started singing with a band while I was at Northwestern, but I didn't truly pursue music until Linda Cain hooked me up with an audition-type gig at Blue Chicago. She spotted me sitting in with Pete Special (who was an old neighbour that I ran into years later at a restaurant he was playing). From there I played with Pete's band, and he decided that the band could centre around me. As time went on, I just kept gigging, and soon my career

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### 50 WOMEN IN THE BLUES

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just happened by popular demand. I started doing a lot of corporate and private work. I have worked with my present band now for over twenty years.

#### WHO WERE/ARE YOUR INFLUENCES?

Always a hard question for me. I draw upon almost everyone and everything – quite like an actor uses life experiences to form characters. I will try to name early influences: Janis Joplin, Nina Simone, Aretha Franklin, Moms Mabley, Etta James, Alberta Hunter, Bette Midler, the Baptist preachers (my grandfather was a preacher), classic blues performers.

#### WHY CHOOSE THE BLUES?

Blues has always come natural to me, and the approach to singing, the freedom in performing, has always been a part of my singing DNA.

#### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR APPROACH?

Organic. I also find the character of the song, and of course I try to find my own personal experience and feel the emotion or playfulness of any song I sing.

#### DO YOU WRITE OR COMPOSE YOUR OWN MATERIAL?

Not much. For some reason I have not done much songwriting. I am a good writer, so I don't really know why I haven't done more so.

#### WHICH DO YOU PREFER – PLAYING LIVE OR BEING IN A STUDIO? WHY?

I love live performing because of the immediate contact and relationship with the audience, but I love studio work – everything about it, the technology, the intimacy of voice to microphone in the studio, but I sometimes find it a challenge to recreate the same energy as a live performance. I get there, but it sometimes takes me a minute...

#### ARE AUDIENCES DIFFERENT AROUND THE WORLD?

Yes. Some audiences are more polite – they don't get vocal right away. I think it's a matter of respect for the artist, but I like a spirited audience. Obviously some work requires a listening audience...

As the work slowed down I started doing smaller intimate concerts, and I finally started writing my one-woman show. It includes monologues and music, video projections and sound. I also started working with other artists such as Corky Siegel and the French composer Isabelle Olivier. I was cast in her jazz opera *Don't Worry, Be HaRpy* – that experience changed my life, as it built my confidence when it comes to being totally free in improvisation, and I really got to incorporate my acting skills as well.

#### WHAT WERE THE HIGHLIGHTS?

Travels to Europe and live concert settings where the audience and I are in complete sync.

#### WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES?

I was always able to get work when I was younger, but as I aged I found that the work became scarce at times. But I will never stop. I diversified.

#### IS THERE ONE SONG THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOUR HEART?

'Feeling Good.'

#### IS THERE ONE ARTIST WHO HAS TRULY INSPIRED YOU?

Nina Simone.

#### HOW DO YOU PROMOTE YOUR IMAGE/YOUR BRAND?

Social media. It is not a calculated thing. I just keep it real. I have always had the intuitive sense to keep a mailing list from the very beginning. You have to build a fanbase and organize enough to be able to call upon them to come out and support you.

#### HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH OBSTACLES SUCH AS AGEISM, SEXISM AND RACISM?



**DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE VENUE? WHY?**

City Winery, because the philosophy of the place is that performers are treated like artists, not purely as a vehicle to sell drinks and admissions.

**DESCRIBE YOUR JOURNEY AS AN ARTIST/MUSICIAN/SINGER.**

As I described earlier, I went from singing a choir as a child to gigging with my band.

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Oh man. I started as a younger, thinner artist, and I definitely see the work diminish as I get older, fatter and less mobile...

**ARE AWARDS HELPFUL?**

Yes. They add to the resume and profile of the artist.



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