

NIKKI YANOFSKY Biography

Over the past year, Montreal-born songstress Nikki Yanofsky has headlined major jazz festivals from Canada to Japan, played Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and The Kennedy Center, toured with award-winning composer Marvin Hamlisch, performed with the legendary Count Basie Orchestra, collaborated with influential hip-hop artist Wyclef Jean, released a live CD/DVD paying tribute to her favorite singer, Ella Fitzgerald, and been interviewed by NBC's Brian Williams. Her voice can be heard on the English-language version of, Believe, the uplifting theme music for Canadian television's coverage of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. Sounds like the career of a seasoned performer, right?

Yanofsky is indeed a seasoned performer who happens to have just turned 16. Her live debut at the age of 12 singing for more than 100,000 people at the 2006 Montreal International Jazz Festival made her the youngest artist ever to appear there. She was also the youngest artist ever to record for the renowned jazz label Verve when her cover of Airmail Special was included on the 2007 compilation We All Love Ella: Celebrating the First Lady of Song (alongside contributions by Natalie Cole, Diana Krall, Michael Bubl , and Gladys Knight). Canada's Maclean's magazine has praised her multi-octave range, impeccable pitch, increasingly rich tone, and unexpectedly soulful power noting that the jazz world has celebrated many a prodigy, but none has been met with this much unanimous adulation or hope since Wynton Marsalis drew his first raves in the early '80s.

But to Yanofsky, age is nothing but a number. People are always asking me how it feels to be so young and singing at this or that event and my response is always, 'I don't know, I've never been older!' Yanofsky says with a laugh. I think it's funny that people are so fascinated by a number, because, really, that's all it is. It's more my experience that matters.

Experience is something Yanofsky has in spades and she puts it to good use on her debut studio album, Nikki, which will be released in May by Decca Records. Produced by 15-time Grammy-winning producer Phil Ramone (Ray Charles, Frank Sinatra, Burt Bacharach) and Grammy-winning songwriter and producer Jesse Harris (best known for his work on Norah Jones' Come Away With Me and Feels Like Home), Nikki is a fizzy, spirited collection of newly arranged standards and elegant originals Yanofsky co-wrote with Harris and Canadian singersongwriter Ron Sexsmith that reflects her love for jazz, blues, R&B, soul, and traditional pop vocal styles. The album is very personal and allows the listener to get to know me, Yanofsky says. You hear where I came from my musical influences, and you hear where I'm going through the originals.

Though it's clearly a showcase for Yanofsky's preternatural vocal gifts, Nikki rises above the novelty of a teenaged singer taking on selections from the American Songbook thanks to the modern, youthful spin put on the arrangements. George and Ira Gershwin's big-band classic "I Got Rhythm" opens with a sultry vamp before Yanofsky counts off "1,2,3,4" and kicks into a funky version of the tune popularized by Ella Fitzgerald and many others. Yanofsky's take on Billie Holiday's signature song "God Bless The Child" combines her rendition with a version by jazz-fusion band Blood, Sweat & Tears, while the intro to Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields' "On the Sunny Side of the Street" features the notorious riff from Led Zeppelin's "Fool In the Rain" a nod to Yanofsky's love for classic rock. Finally, Billy Strayhorn's swing standard "Take the 'A' Train" features new, original lyrics (When I'm in New York City I go see theater / I love NY, the T-shirts say they love me too) that namecheck the musicals Yanofsky will see (Wicked, Rent, Legally Blonde, and Hairspray all get a shout-out) before she takes the A train to go to Sugar Hill way up in Harlem.

Several stunning original compositions round out the proceedings. Yanofsky cowrote the moody "For Another Day," the groovy "Never Make It On Time," the sprightly "Bienvenue Dans Ma Vie," and the soulful, R&B-flavored "Cool My Heels" with Harris and Sexsmith during writing sessions in the basement of her home in Montreal. "Working with them was amazing," Yanofsky says. "Jesse has written some of the most beautiful songs around and has really helped to shape my sound, and Ron is one of my favorite lyricists ever. He gets everything that's in my head onto paper." And then there's producer Phil Ramone, whom Yanofsky holds in huge regard for his vast experience. "He is a living example of what you can accomplish if you work really hard and believe in your dream," she says.

Dreams are important to Yanofsky, who's been singing ever since she could talk and knew she wanted to be a performer since the age of four. "My dad was always saying to my mom, "It's weird, she's four, but she doesn't go off-tune,"



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she says. "When I was five, I fell in love with the Beatles, Stevie Wonder, and Aretha Franklin. I didn't start listening to jazz until I was 12. I became obsessed with Ella Fitzgerald after downloading a bunch of her songs from iTunes. She's the one who introduced me to jazz and really taught me how to sing. She had the most amazing technique, her timing and her tone, she never hit a bad note in her live performances. And she sang with so much emotion."

Such was Yanofsky's love for the First Lady of Song that when she was invited back to perform at the Montreal Jazz Festival in 2007, Yanofsky decided to devote her entire set to Fitzgerald. A reprise of that show is captured on the 2008 live CD/DVD entitled Ella-Of Thee I Swing, which was recorded at the Place des Arts in Montreal in October 2007. The package was nominated for two Juno Awards (Canada's version of a Grammy): Jazz Vocal Album of the Year and New Artist of the Year.

Although Fitzgerald remains her primary inspiration, Yanofsky does not consider herself a jazz singer. "I consider myself an 'everything' singer," she says. "Jazz is definitely my first love and I will always want to sing it, but I also love to sing pop, R&B, blues, and everything else, and Nikki definitely reflects that. For me, performing isn't about fame and fortune, it's about expressing myself through music. I'd be just as happy singing in a restaurant as I am in front of a huge crowd as long as I'm singing. The fact that I could put out my own album at such a young age is a dream come true."



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