



## Jessica Jones Quartet **WORD** New Artists Records (NA 1045)

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Following in the tradition of Charles Mingus's *A Modern Jazz Symposium of Music and Poetry* and other seminal po' jazz works by Beat poets like Kenneth Rexroth, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Kenneth Patchen, Ken Nordine and Gregory Corso, saxophonist-composer-bandleader Jessica Jones explores the marriage of poetry and jazz on *Word*. A true family affair, this provocative new release on the New Artists label features Bay Area native Jessica and her husband Tony Jones -- perhaps the only tenor sax playing husband and wife tandem in jazz -- and prominently showcases their daughter Candace, a promising young R&B singer with a radiant voice and deep jazz roots, who makes a striking vocal contribution to "Side One" of this dual personality CD.

Their son Levi also appears on one track playing bass.

Poets Abe Maneri and Arisa White are featured reciting their original work as well as improvising words on "Side Two," the spoken word portion of this adventurous two-sided outing. "I met them both when I was teaching at art camp here in Brooklyn," Jones says of poets Maneri and White. "We did some live performances for the kids and afterwards we said, 'Hey, let's do this together.' I really liked what they did because they're both very musical. I worked with some other poets but none were as musical as these two. The way that they recite is affected by the music, and they're able to interact the way a musician reacts in terms of intonation and also improvising, which isn't always true with poets."

Other musicians appearing on *Word* are saxophonist Dayna Stephens (playing primarily bass here) and drummer Lou Grassi on Side One, French horn player Mark Taylor, bassist Ken Filiano and drummer Kenny Wollesen on Side Two. Says Jones, "We did dabble with the idea of following it through and making it two different albums but I liked it all being on one CD. And to me, the two halves are not that different. They're like two sides of the same coin and there are two separate covers -- one for each side."

Two decades after studying "The Sound of Language as Music" at the University of California, where she was linguistics major, Jessica has gone back to her roots in giving equal voice to organized sound and organized words on her ambitious *Word*. On Side One, Jessica primarily plays piano, accompanying her daughter Candace, whose gorgeous voice registers with confidence, crystal clarity, flawless intonation and great emotional depth on five originals and two jazz standards: Jerome Kern's "Yesterdays" and Rogers & Hart's "My Romance."

The collection opens with "Everything Is," Jessica's relaxed, emotive ballad underscored by Grassi's supple brushwork and given a dramatic reading by Candace. "I wrote that for her when she was around 16 or 17," says Jones of her daughter. "The lyrics are kind of written for her personality, and she knows it. She really sings it like it was written for her."

"Miss Kelly's" is a jaunty swinger delivered with hip insouciance by Candace. "That piece was written for a place in Oakland at Jack London Square where musicians used to go after the jam sessions to have breakfast at two in the morning," explains Jessica. "Some of the jazz elders would hold court there, telling stories about being on the road, and I liked hanging out with them and listening. The woman you'd pay at the front was named Miss Kelly. And the musicians called the place Miss Kelly's, even though it was actually the Jack London Inn. So this piece was just a respectful acknowledgement of the apprenticeship that I got in those days from hanging

out at Miss Kelly's." Jessica offers a swinging piano solo here while Tony's smoky tenor work adds an *outré* charm to the track.

"The Roses" is a bit of sophisticated, witty wordplay and rhyming reminiscent of classic Cole Porter and is delivered with verve and panache by Candace. Says Jessica, "I used to work at Carl Fischer (famous sheet music house in Manhattan). And I feel like that's where I really learned about that culture of Tin Pan Alley. In the store they had sheet music that had been sitting there since 1930 and people were always coming in to look for it. They'd sing a few bars and somebody in the store would know the tune and we'd find the sheet music for them. It's something that's not really around anymore, where a song originated in a Broadway musical and then began so popular that everybody knew it and jazz musicians played it. That culture context is gone." Tony's ethereal tenor solo here is typically elliptical and unpredictable, artfully straddling an inside-out aesthetic reminiscent of Joe Henderson or Dewey Redman.

Candace, a talent definitely deserving of wider recognition, swings convincingly on an up-tempo romp through "Yesterdays," which features a fine tenor solo from Young Lion Dayna Stephens. Says Jessica, "Candace likes this piece so I wrote an arrangement around it for her. And I was really glad to have Dayna on there and give him some space. They've known each other for the past ten years, since they were teenagers. It was more of a vehicle for them."

Candace also turns in a jaunty performance on "My Romance," which features her parents (who met in Berkeley High School's jazz band) in close harmony on two tenors. Jessica's potent, extended tenor solo here against Stephens's walking bass and Grassi's slick brushwork is a highlight of the track. "That arrangement is something that I wrote for a saxophone trio that I was in in California," she explains, adding that it was dedicated to one of the members of that sax trio, Ken Durling, who passed away last year. "We adapted it for this ensemble and I like playing on it because I feel like I can play freely, even though its got changes. And I added a little loopy part so I can spin out a little bit."

The starkly dramatic "Come Down The Hall" is Jessica's impressionistic take on life in New York, the lyrics delivered with a chilling, understated power by daughter Candace. "This piece reminds me of a Lester Bowie song called 'New York Is Full Of Lonely People' from an Art Ensemble album," says Jessica. "I wasn't thinking of that when I wrote it but I relate to that feeling of how isolated people can be, even though everybody's bumping up against each other." Tony's stealth tenor solo here floats in and out of the mix like a jazzy specter hovering over the proceedings. "Tony's sense of how to play with the vocalist is amazing," says Jessica of her tenor sax-playing husband. "The popping in, popping out and complementing what's around you is so much his thing. He plays saxophone like it's a comping instrument and he does it with such imagination, all the time."

The bridge between the two sides of *Word* is the freewheeling 6/8 vehicle "What Purpose Is Your Pain," which is sung with jazzy authority by Candace and features the musicians from Side Two -- drummer Kenny Wollesen, bassist Ken Filiano, French horn player Mark Taylor and the two Joneses on tenor saxes. "There's a lot of group horn improvisation in there that I like," says Jessica. "It's a very improvisatory type group of people." These same masterful musicians, so adept at collective improvisation, provide loose, highly interactive support on Jessica's compositions beneath Arisa White's poems "Saratoga Avenue" and "I'm Calling," which is set to Jessica's cyclical composition "Loose Pajamas." As the composer explains, "That piece is tricky because of the way that the parts don't quite fit with each other. One might be in three and one might be in four and they come together at some point. It just reminded me of something that fits but is a little loose and it still works out."

Abe Maneri's poem "Daddy's Love Talk Talk" is set to Jones's somber and probing composition "Diagnosis Henry," which she explains was a loose interpretation of some concepts she had gotten from composer Henry Threadgill. Maneri's other spoken word contribution, "End," is set to Jessica's buoyant, South African-flavored composition "Two Psalms." The final piece, "So Misunderstanding," is a totally free piece conjured on the spot by the open-minded collective and with both poets actively engaged in the process. "I really like the way they played off each other," says Jessica. "It's like she's saying this stuff to get him involved and he sort of refers to it

and then goes somewhere else. I was just stunned by the way they interacted with the words on this group improvisation.”

Nearly 50 years ago, the worlds of poetry and jazz collided with such galvanizing force that it spawned a whole movement that continues to this day. In “Poetry and Jazz: A Twentieth-Century Wedding,” author Barry Wallenstein states that “Poetry has always craved the company of music.” He goes on to explain, “Tone, rhythm and cadence, and lyricism too, are the property of both.” It seemed inevitable, then, that these two artistic expressions would merge, creating a unique genre unto itself. Beat poets like Kenneth Rexroth, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso first began wedding poetry to jazz in 1957 when they collaborated with an improvising quintet at the Cellar, a downstairs nightclub that used to be a Chinese restaurant and was converted into a jazz club. As San Francisco jazz critic Ralph J. Gleason wrote in the original liner notes to 1957’s *Poetry Readings in the Cellar* (Fantasy): “The poets read their poetry while the jazz band improvised. The results were startling and exciting. The entire album was recorded at the Cellar by Fantasy and is offered in the hope that this is a step toward a new form in jazz, a new dimension. And also that it can be a beacon to attract a larger audience for modern poetry.”

There has been a plethora of notable po’ jazz projects in recent years coming out of two different camps -- jazz musicians setting existing classic text to music and poets reading their own works backed by adventurous, improvising jazz ensembles. The result of all this activity is a thriving po’ jazz scene; one that is perhaps more active now than at any time since the genre’s golden era. Recent years have seen a plethora of ambitious po’ jazz projects by such composer-bandleaders as singers Luciana Souza, Kurt Elling and Jay Clayton, pianists Fred Hersch, Brad Mehldau and Vijay Iyer, trumpeter Dave Douglas, drummer-percussionist Tom Teasley, saxophonist Andrew Rathburn, drummers Jerry Granelli and Matt Wilson, and bassist Steve Swallow. Jessica Jones’s *Word* is a noteworthy addition to that burgeoning list.

Brooklyn resident **Jessica Jones** has collaborated with such important jazz artists as Joseph Jarman, Connie Crothers, Don Cherry and Cecil Taylor. A charter member, along with her husband Tony, of Peter Apfelbaum’s Hieroglyphics Ensemble (which back trumpeter Cherry on his 1990 A&M release *Multikulti*), she was part of a circle of Bay Area musical renegades, including trumpeter Steven Bernstein, saxophonists Peck Allmond and Craig Handy and pianist Benny Green, who would eventually relocate to Brooklyn. Upon moving to New York, Haitian popular music became a training ground for her. She toured nationally and internationally with the band Skah-Shah, and performed and arranged music for two records by another New York-based Haitian band, the Oui Band. In her early years in New York, she furthered her jazz education by attending the Jazzmobile School and the early Steve Coleman and Five Elements workshop sessions. She also hung out at Barry Harris’ Jazz Cultural Theater and the rehearsal studio of the group Air as well as frequenting jam sessions throughout the city and attending a workshop at the Creative Music Studio in Woodstock with the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Her Jessica Jones Quartet has been featured in the What Is Jazz? Festival at New York’s Knitting Factory and also at the Eddie Moore Jazz Festival at Yoshi’s in Oakland, in addition to performing at many Bay Area and East coast clubs, colleges and radio stations. Jessica also performs in a duet setting with her husband Tony. *Word* is her fourth recording as a leader and follows 2005’s *Nod* (New Artists Records), 2002’s *Shakeup* (independent release) and 1997’s *Family* (Nine Winds). She also performed as part of Joseph Jarman’s Lifetime Visions Orchestra on 2006’s *Lifetime Visions for the Magnificent Humans*.

- Bill Milkowski

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