

Kendra Shank - Biography



Kendra Shank's crystal-pure tone, powerful musicianship and elastic phrasing have won her rave critical notices and fans internationally. Hailed by *The New York Times* as a "superbly skilled vocalist" and an artist of "effervescence, depth," and "integrity" (Nate Chinen), she headlines at top venues across the U.S. and abroad, captivating audiences with her genuine warmth and musicality. Shank combines jazz originals, standards, world music, French songs, folk/pop tunes, and open improvisation in an adventurous, genre-bending style that inspired Gary Giddins to call her "one of New York's most original performers." (*Jazz Times*)

Originally a folk/pop singer-guitarist based in Seattle, Kendra Shank comes to performance naturally. Born in California to a playwright father and actress mother, Kendra was acting in plays at age 5, picked up the guitar at 13, and at 19 began her music career playing in Parisian subways and

sidewalk cafés. After several years on the west coast folk music circuit, a Billie Holiday recording inspired her to pursue jazz.

In 1989 Shank began studying with jazz vocalist Jay Clayton in Seattle, while keeping dual residency in Paris, France where she gigged in jazz clubs. Her jazz career blossomed quickly and in 1991 she was hired by Bob Dorough as vocalist-guitarist-percussionist for his west coast tour. She soon caught the attention of jazz legend Shirley Horn, who invited Kendra to perform as her guest at the Village Vanguard in New York and co-produced Shank's critically-acclaimed debut compact disc **Afterglow** (Mapleshade, 1994), featuring pianist Larry Willis and saxophonist Gary Bartz.

Ms. Shank relocated to New York in 1997 and recorded two albums for Jazz Focus Records: **Wish** (1998), which *Time* magazine's Terry Teachout called "delectable" and advised "get in on the ground floor, this lady is going up," and **Reflections** (2000), which made the *Boston Globe's* Top Ten list: "This vocalist makes lyrics believable, invents like an instrumentalist, and has an ear second to none for little-known and unknown tunes," wrote the *Globe's* Bob Blumenthal.

Reflections debuted The Kendra Shank Quartet, her current working band, featuring pianist Frank Kimbrough, bassist Dean Johnson, and drummer Tony Moreno. This ensemble, in which Shank focuses on improvisational group interplay, is also featured on her ground-breaking 2007 release, **A Spirit Free: Abbey Lincoln Songbook** (Challenge Records), which received numerous Best of the Year citations and charted on jazz radio. Journalist Lawrence Brazier marveled that the group displays "...a practically telepathic integration...these four people appear to have emerged from the same womb" (*Jazz Now*). The quartet's decade-long collaboration reaches new depths of creative expression on Shank's upcoming release **Mosaic** (April 14, 2009, Challenge Records), where they are joined by multi-reedist Billy Drewes and guitarist Ben Monder. This album unifies

Shank's rich and varied musical journey from folk singer-guitarist to jazz improviser to boundary-less performing artist.

In addition to her recordings as a leader, Shank was guest guitarist on Abbey Lincoln's CD *Over The Years* (Verve), sang vocalise lines on Peter Leitch's *Blues On the Corner* CD (Reservoir), and has been a vocal guest with Jay Clayton, Bud Shank, Rhiannon, and Randy Halberstadt. Hailed by *Downbeat* magazine as a top female vocalist (1999, 2006, 2007), she has been featured on National Public Radio's *JazzSet* and *Piano Jazz with Marian McPartland*, and has taught clinics at the University of North Carolina-Asheville, The New School (New York City), Brooklyn/Queens Conservatory of Music (New York City), and the Jazz in Marciac Festival (France). Appearances include Blue Note, Birdland, Iridium, Jazz Standard, JVC Jazz Festival, Blues Alley, Scullers, Regatta Bar, Jazz Bakery, Jazz Alley, The Green Mill, The Dakota, Jazz in Marciac Festival, Jazz à Vienne Festival, Edmonton Jazz Festival, Calgary Jazz Festival, and countless others.

www.kendrashank.com

Short Bio

Hailed by *The New York Times* as a "superbly skilled vocalist" and an artist of "effervescence, depth," and "integrity", **Kendra Shank** headlines at top venues across the U.S. and abroad, combining jazz originals, standards, world music, French songs, folk/pop tunes, and open improvisation in an adventurous, genre-bending style that inspired Gary Giddins to call her "one of New York's most original performers." (*Jazz Times*)

Shank's critically-acclaimed debut CD, ***Afterglow*** (1994), was co-produced by Shirley Horn for Mapleshade Records. After forging successful careers in Paris, France and Seattle, WA, Shank moved to New York in 1997 where she recorded two albums for Jazz Focus Records, ***Wish*** (1998) and ***Reflections*** (2000), garnering praise from *Time* magazine. These were followed by her ground-breaking 2007 release, ***A Spirit Free: Abbey Lincoln Songbook***, which received numerous Best of the Year citations. Her upcoming April 2009 release, ***Mosaic***, features her New York working band of 10 years: pianist Frank Kimbrough, bassist Dean Johnson, and drummer Tony Moreno, plus guest multi-reedist Billy Drewes and guitarist Ben Monder.

Recognized by *Downbeat* magazine as a top female vocalist (1999, 2006, 2007), Shank has been featured on NPR's *JazzSet* and *Marian McPartland's Piano Jazz*, and has performed with Abbey Lincoln, Fred Hersch, Jaki Byard, Jay Clayton, Bob Dorough, Bud Shank, Victor Lewis, Billy Hart, among others. "This vocalist makes lyrics believable, invents like an instrumentalist, and has an ear second to none for little-known and unknown tunes." (Bob Blumenthal, *The Boston Globe*)

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Kendra Shank - Press Quotes

"Effervescence...depth...integrity..." **-Nate Chinen, NEW YORK TIMES**

"...striking...her musicianship is powerful." **-Nat Hentoff, WALL STREET JOURNAL**

"Kendra Shank's delectable voice—warm-toned, fine-grained, quietly sexy—sets her well apart from the crowd, as does her knack for picking unhackneyed, slightly off-center material. The up-tempo tunes swing hard; the ballads shimmer and shine." **-Terry Teachout, TIME MAGAZINE**

"...a standout...a unique and immediately identifiable sound and style. ...Her renderings of songs often took a reconstructive path, as she disassembled phrases, then reassembled them in her own imaginative fashion...the results were remarkable." **-Don Heckman, LOS ANGELES TIMES**

"...she takes the old folkie "Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair" and gradually whips it into a Coltrane-esque emotional frenzy. ...Shank is supremely talented, innovative and at the same time readily accessible. There's no one else quite like her." **-Will Friedwald, VILLAGE VOICE**

"This vocalist makes lyrics believable, invents like an instrumentalist, and has an ear second to none for little-known and unknown tunes. Shank is that rarity among jazz vocalists, a risk taker who stays in tune...She also functions like a true equal with her excellent rhythm section." **-Bob Blumenthal, BOSTON GLOBE**

"...uniquely seductive and captivating: her voice envelopes you like cool, soft sheets." **-Marc Fisher, WASHINGTON POST**

"...Shank intoxicates with a combination of power and perfume." **-Neil Tesser, CHICAGO READER**

"Kendra Shank sounds like sunlight shining through a stained-glass window, her crystalline tone illuminating each song. Working her voice like a horn, she phrases inventively, whether crisp and sizzling or sensuously smoky. She's definitely an original." **-Patricia Myers, JAZZ TIMES MAGAZINE**

"A wide open, mind-bending celebration of the human spirit...strong and evocative..." **-Tom Henry, THE BLADE**

"Ms. Shank is a risk taker who ventures fearlessly onto the high wire...one of the most interesting, creative and promising jazz singers of her generation." **-Mathew Bahl, ALL ABOUT JAZZ**

"...she knows how to extract the maximum drama from a lyric with precisely calibrated phrasing and a rich, polychromatic tone, at turns ebullient and vulnerable." **-Ted Panken, DOWNBEAT MAGAZINE**

★★★★ "The precociously talented Kendra Shank is among the best of the great young jazz vocalists to emerge in the 1990's. Wish is a multigeneric masterpiece." **-John Swenson, ROLLING STONE JAZZ & BLUES ALBUM GUIDE (5 stars)**

"Entrancing..." **-Jim Macnie, VILLAGE VOICE**

"How does she do it? Simple. Shank, who started out as a folk singer before coming to jazz, has obviously picked up on what both mentor Shirley Horn and close associate Abbey Lincoln have always known: As long as you locate a song's essential core, its emotional truth – which Shank does unfailingly – you can go just about anywhere you want with it. Add a warm, supple voice, an expert lyrical sense and a terrific ear for obscure and unusual material, and well, it's a lock." **-Brandt Reiter, LA WEEKLY**