

# MARY LOUISE KNUTSON

jazz pianist | composer

press



## ***Twin Cities Jazz Pianist Mary Louise Knutson is Always Thriving***

**August 25, 2015**

**By Anna Pratt, Star Tribune (Mpls-St.Paul)**

**(EXCERPT)**

### **An eclectic style**

Jazz pianist Mary Louise Knutson has made a living by doing a variety of gigs, playing with the Mary Louise Knutson Trio and many other groups and vocalists, giving private lessons, teaching master classes or courses at Carleton College in Northfield, and writing music.

In 2007, Knutson's trio toured 20 cities across the country. She was also a **finalist in the in the Kennedy Center's Mary Lou Williams "Women in Jazz" International Pianist Competition** and her music is featured in an art documentary titled "Wellington Lee: 60 Years of Artistic Photography." Later this month, she'll **tour around the country with trumpeter and former "Tonight Show" bandleader Doc Severinsen**, a gig she's had for the past four years.

"It all pieces together...it's improvising a living," she said.

When Knutson began her career and moved to Minneapolis in 1988, she immersed herself in jazz as much as she could, often playing solo for private parties. She used to frequent jam sessions at the old Artists' Quarter at 26th and Nicollet in Minneapolis, trying to build up her skills.

That led to playing with different groups. In the early 1990s, Knutson started the Mary Louise Knutson Trio, which features her playing along with bassists and drummers. It was around that time that she got serious about composing and arranging music, which she'd only dabbled in before. "I wanted to feature my own voice," she said.

**Her taste in jazz is eclectic, and that shines through in her compositions.** Some tunes are inspired by classic mainstream style jazz, while others are influenced by the likes of jazz pianist Chick Corea, one of the founders of the jazz-fusion style, or ECM recording artist Keith Jarrett.

**Her original music is accessible, yet she tries to keep it interesting for longtime jazz devotees.**

**Her most recent CD, "In the Bubble," which came out in 2011, charted in JazzWeek's Top 10.** The title track was inspired by a Costa Rica trip. She and her friends seemingly had the place to themselves. "It was as if we were in this sweet spot where only good could come to us," the music liner notes say. "We kept saying, 'We're in the bubble!'"

By contrast, another song, "Sea of Qi," seemingly "floats through a range of emotions. Sometimes your emotions will buoy you, like water. Sometimes they'll devour you."

The composing/arranging seems to flow out of her. "Somewhere deep inside me, my collected experiences are bubbling, and then I want to go explore at the piano," she said, adding, "I'm trying to put intervals and melodies together to explain those inner experiences."

When she's working hard on composing, some days seem fruitful and other times it feels as if nothing is happening. Knutson has learned that she "can't have expectations of when the music will surface. I just have to trust that it will in its own time," she said.

Gordon Johnson, a jazz bassist who met Knutson years ago, when she was new to the Twin Cities, said via e-mail that he was **"especially impressed with her harmonic approach at that time. She reminded me of pianist Bill Evans."**

Since then, he's played and recorded with her trio. Her CD "In the Bubble" brought out some of his best playing, he said.

He enjoys her **compositions, which are "deep and thoughtful, and her method of recording was determined and meticulous,"** he said.

Jeff Whitmill, who first hired Knutson to perform at the Jazz@StBarney's, a series at St Barnabas Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, nearly a decade ago, describes her as a whirlwind, **"a profound performer, talented composer, thoroughly engaging teacher** and passionate consumer of M&Ms."

A professional through-and-through, **she "treats every gig as if it were a command performance for the toniest crowd you could imagine,"** Whitmill said.

**JAZZIZ**  
MAGAZINE

***Mary Louise Knutson, In the Bubble***  
**Spring 2012**  
**JAZZIZ Magazine**

Ranked in JazzWeek's Top 10, pianist Mary Louise Knutson's new trio CD, *In the Bubble*, showcases her warm soulful touch, tasteful arranging, and gift for composition. Six standards and four originals range from a Ray Brown Trio-style "It Could Happen to You" to a McCoy-ish "Can You Hear Me Now?" to a Jarrett-esque "You Are My Sunshine." These ten will remain at the top of your playlist for years.

***Mary Louise Knutson, CD-release show***

**Wednesday, November 23, 2011**

**by Rick Mason, City Pages, Mpls-St. Paul**

...her charming new album...*In the Bubble*, has been well worth the wait. Her straight-ahead approach to a collection almost evenly split between jazz standards and her own smart compositions spotlights her luminous work on the ivories, which is endearingly lyrical, sprightly, and rife with inventive nuances. She's been accurately compared to Bill Evans and Marian McPartland, with maybe the playful spirit of Vince Guaraldi thrown in. "Luminous," incidentally, is what Knutson calls a jaunty, adventurous bridge she wrote for a striking, gospel-like version of the pop nugget "You Are My Sunshine." Other highlights are her shimmery, emotionally rich arrangement of Toots Thielemans's "Bluesette," the subtly swinging "Bernie's Tune," and her rambunctious McCoy Tyner-influenced original "Can You Hear Me Now?"

**JAZZINK**

***Mary Louise Knutson Trio, CD Release at the Dakota***

**Wednesday, December 7, 2011**

**by Andrea Canter**

No surprise here. After a standing room only celebration a week earlier at the AQ, our resident poet laureate of piano repeated the feat across the river, filling up the Dakota with a lot of original songs from both the new *In the Bubble* and her debut album, *Call Me When You Get There*. With her core trio of Gordy Johnson and Phil Hey, Mary Louise captivated the audience with her elegant touch and powerful arrangements. Well, maybe some were surprised. One man mentioned he had only heard Mary Louise with the JazzMN Orchestra and did not realize she had such talents as a composer and chamber performer. Hopefully the new recording will keep these talents on public display.

## **JAZZINK**

### ***Mary Louise Knutson Trio at the Artists Quarter***

**Friday, November 25, 2011**

**by Andrea Canter**

Proof that trio outings from Mary Louise Knutson are much too infrequent was the standing-room only crowd on hand on Thanksgiving Eve to celebrate her new CD, *In the Bubble*. While the title refers to an “everything was perfect” vacation, it just as easily describes the interaction among the musicians, on CD and on stage. With masters of nuance, bassist Gordy Johnson and drummer Phil Hey, the trio created a perfect storm of music, with lustrous new arrangements of such masterpieces as “Bluesette”, “It Could Happen to You,” “That’s All” and even “You Are My Sunshine,” and “should be classic” new compositions like “Sea of Qi,” “Can You Hear Me Now” and the title track. ML also dipped back into her first recording for the playful “Merle the Pearl” and started the second set solo with her version of “Pennies From Heaven.” And you had to listen fast at times to catch all of the trio’s antics, such as the series of Ellington quotes in Jobim’s “So Danco Samba” and Gordy Johnson’s nod to Stevie Wonder while “In the Bubble.” I know a lot more whizzed by my ears. If you missed this one, or just want more, the trio will hold their Minneapolis release party at the Dakota on November 30th.

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