

## NORA McCARTHY

**Creative Jazz Voice, Composer, Lyricist, Poet, Actor, Visual Artist, Author, and Educator**



Nora McCarthy is indeed a remarkable figure in the New York jazz scene. She possesses the earthiness of an early blues singer, the articulation, phrasing and timbre of a jazz trumpet. Her unique and original style has made her a prominent vocalist, composer, improviser, and poet.

McCarthy's versatility is one of her strong points. She has demonstrated that she is comfortable with both the inside and the outside of musical expression. And whether she gets into free form, abstract improvisations, or performing standards, McCarthy is as expressive as she is unpredictable. Her adept and adventurous improvising is on a high level; she is a musical colorist eager to push the envelope. With a sound

reminiscent of the great voices and horns in jazz, her burnished alto voice is steeped in the classic jazz and rhythm & blues tradition and is rich with a distinctive style that draws on both the spirituality of post-bop instrumentalists and the spirituality of post-bop vocal jazz. Nora's ever increasing need to expand her own musical consciousness and convey a spiritual awareness through the music is her creative motivation and inspiration.

McCarthy performs in every setting from a voice and saxophone duo to a twenty-piece orchestra. Her original compositions and arrangements are stunning works of art and include graphic compositions, soundscapes, and poetic architectures.

McCarthy currently leads the following groups: The Nora McCarthy Trio; Lyrical Duosity; Nora McCarthy Qu'ART'et; The People of Peace Quintet; The Panama Red Trio; Modern Voice Ensemble, and Manna For Thought Improvising Trio. She has been in collaboration with her husband alto saxophonist Jorge Sylvester for the past 23 years and as a result of this intensive collaboration, craftsmanship, and discipline, their hard-won synergy has enabled them to create nine distinct creative new music/poetry projects which includes the renowned ConceptualMotion 21-piece Orchestra, A Small Dream In Red Innovative Improvising Duo, Jorge Sylvester ACE (Afro-Caribbean-Experimental) Collective and the Extended Edition with Strings; Quartet Imagination; and an improvising octet, Spontaneous Expressions. *Mayhem at Large*, this group's first CD was released in late 2021 is a live performance captured at the Baha'i Center in March 2020.

Nora is a gifted poet and lyricist who has amassed a large body of prose, poetry, and word art that she's written for her many musical projects as well as lyrics she's penned for other well known jazz compositions. Her powerfully moving delivery of the spoken word and interpretation of the lyrics reflect her deep and intense emotional capacity.

McCarthy's living poem, "Today In America" is one such work that began in 2001 and is a time lapsed look at ongoing events written in a collage format and delivered in the passionate poetic style of the great activist poets of the 60's and 70's. Written for the composition of the same title composed by alto saxophonist, Jorge Sylvester and performed by their ConceptualMotion Orchestra.

The importance of Nora's work as a member of *A Chorus of Poets* and her affiliation with its founder, the late Conductor Lawrence D. "Butch" Morris from 2005 to 2015 as the Chorus organizer and featured poet, cannot be overstated.

Nora's long-term association with the legendary experimental Medicine Show Theatre in New York afforded her the opportunity to hone her acting skills. Inspired and encouraged by its Co-Founder, Actor, and Artistic Director Barbara Vann and working with its Manager, Actor, Poet, Chris Brandt, Nora was a member of the cast in *Listen To Me*—an Opera (Music by: Rainy Orteca—Text by Gertrude Stein. In addition, Nora played "Aunt Beth" in *Moral Support*, a drama written by Bill Considine, directed by Félix E. Gardón, and participated in several on stage readings.

Through her vast experience in the jazz and creative music field, Nora has developed a spiritual and conceptual approach to teaching vocal artistry including unique improvisatory techniques that views singing through the lens of an interdisciplinary art form and published her first book entitled: *The Spiritual Path to Finding Your Voice* in the summer of 2024.

McCarthy and her groups have performed at the top jazz venues, concert halls, galleries, theaters, performance spaces, concert halls, universities, and music cafes throughout New York City and the Tri-State area as well as in Austria, Panama, and Podgorica, Montenegro.

McCarthy and her groups have performed at the top jazz venues, concert halls, galleries, theaters, performance spaces, concert halls, universities, and music cafes throughout New York City, upstate New York, the Tri-State area, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Ohio, Europe, and Panama. Some various recent performances with her groups and others: Nublu, NYC; Drom, NYC; Springfield, Massachusetts for North Hampton's Jazz Shares Concert Series, UMass; Skoto's Gallery, NYC; Joe's Pub at The Public Theatre, NYC; Gala event at the historic Walker House, Newark, NJ; The Bar Next Door, a well-known jazz listening room in Greenwich Village from 2014-2020. Other prestigious performances include an 18-year association with Mike Longo's Jazz Tuesday at The Baha'i Center-Dizzy Gillespie Auditorium; The El Taller Latino-Americano, NYC; Arete Venue and Gallery, Brooklyn; 10-year relationship with The Medicine Show Theatre; NYC; Clement's Place Jazz - Newark, NJ, and Michiko Studios Music Series; NYC to name but a few. Nora's earlier performances with her groups and those of other artists are numerous and include: The Blue Note; The Stone, The Jazz Gallery w/Frank Lacy Vibe Tribe; New School-ISIM (International Society for Improvising Musicians) Performances, Roulette, Queens College; Cuny College; Arts For Arts-Clemente Soto; Brucknerhaus, Linz, Austria; La Platea, Panama; and, the American Culture Center, Podgorica, Montenegro; Smoke; Smalls; The Metropolitan Room; Birdland; and, The Vision Festival, to name a few.

**DISCOGRAPHY** - (RedZenRecords™):

*Mayhem at Large - the Last Baha'i, Spontaneous Expressions; Manna For Thought; blesSINGS ; A Time For Love; Spirit Driven; In The Language Of Dreams; Circle Completing; A Small Dream In Red (Sundown Jazz); red&blue.*

*Toward The Hill of Joy - George Brandon-Blue Unity Ensemble (Blue Unity Music)*

## SOME REVIEWS

"...McCarthy's highly expressive burnished alto voice soars on every track. Her broad range is full of lovely textures and nuances and her use of dynamics which is basically a lost art among singers today, is wrought with emotion. Her trademark phrasing and innate sense of rhythm demonstrates not only her expert ability to convey a story but her overall understanding of melodic and harmonic structure—she is a masterful musician. McCarthy uses her complete voice, as an instrument and as an interpreter of the word." *Vocal Jazz CD of the Month - Arnaldo DeSouteiro, Jazz Station Records, Jazz Historian, Record Producer, Los Angeles (Nora McCarthy & The People of Peace Quintet: "blesSINGS")*

"...Her shaping of pitch often foregoes the fluid note-bending of the jazz singer in favor of the full press of a sculptor's touch against viscous clay." *Ramsey Ameen/The Gathering Of The Tribes Magazine*

"...A striking woman of unusually elastic voice, McCarthy infuses her music with poetry and theatricality that's both stark and sensual." *Carlo Wolff, Jazz Journalist, Author*

"...It's delightful to hear music that plays so freely with the known and the unknown elements of jazz." *Florence Wetzel, All About Jazz Magazine, NY*

"...McCarthy is a fearless singer who deftly refuses to be categorized as she explores personalized means for expressing ideas; she travels infrequently heard avenues for exploring thought and adapts vocal technique to fit the circumstances of her message." *Bill Donaldson, Jazz Improv Magazine*

"...McCarthy's vocals often recalled the soft, strained desperation of another Cleveland vocalist, the great Jimmy Scott. The album is, in fact, something of an homage to Scott, ending with the McCarthy original, "Faith in Time (Jimmy's Song)". The singer closed with a barn-burning version of Willie Dixon's "Little Red Rooster" that left the crowd crowing for more and nicely "upset, in every way." *All About Jazz, Matt Marshall*

"...McCarthy's, 'The Light Of Truth's High Noon Is Not For Tender Leaves,' has a spirituality that recalls the late Abbey Lincoln, and McCarthy really soars with that Lincoln-ish mood." *Alex Henderson, Jazz Inside Magazine*

"...The ballad "Too Late Now" (Lerner/Lane) from her CD, *Circle Completing*, is a charmer. Reminding me very much of the late lamented Irene Kral, Nora provocatively sings this melancholy ballad in full throttle." *Dan Singer, In-Tune International Magazine-UK*

"...McCarthy's vocals are rich and subtle and laced with varying degrees of earthy blues and soulful phrasings." *Sounds of Timeless Jazz.com*

"...Nora McCarthy sings with an emphatic delivery. She interprets lyrics with fits of passion and relaxes casually with wordless sprees." *Jim Santella, Jazz Improv, NYC*

"...Circle Completing is a moody suite that deals with the evolution of life, coming to a place of forgiveness, letting go, and ultimately moving on to the next level. Nora's adventurous singing, the spontaneous interplay with John diMartino, and the unpredictability of the music result in the innovative duets being full of subtle surprises." *Scott Yanow, Jazz Critic & Author*

"...McCarthy, who works in every setting from a bass and vocal duo to a twenty-piece orchestra, demonstrates that she is not one to simply serenade with the usual mix of standards." *Dan Bilawsky/Jazz Improv Magazine's New York Jazz Guide*

"...A good poet can tell a story with a minimum of text. So when Nora McCarthy tells the story of lies that have been 'swept under the carpet / all scramble like roaches in the early morning light,' she extends the idea in a couple of directions at once – with a kind of vocalese, aided by skittery piano bits. The presentation says far more than a couple of paragraphs could, that's for sure." *Mark Saleski/Jazz.com*

"...You can hear this woman's life in her voice." *Walter Kolosky, Jazz.com*

"...Nora McCarthy has a deep voice, with the timbre and range of Sarah Vaughan....she uses ever-so-subtle pitch-bending and straight tones and just a lovely touch of vibrato." *Julianne Carney/International Society For Improvised Music*

"...Nora is a musical flurry of passion, soul, emotion, soothsaying, truth telling and jazz poetry that takes you on flights of improvisational abandon with grace and wit. She is a force to be experienced!" *Sarah James, Musician, Poet, Vocalist*

"...Nora McCarthy, the diva, one of the top singers who shaped the jazz vocal, a superb artist!" *João Da Penha (Jazz & Bossa Nova, Brazil)*

"...A non-generic and exciting vocalist to be aware of." *Alex Henderson/All About Jazz And L.A. Jazz Scene*

"...A voice that is alternately liquid, breezy, and lustrous. Sophistication in the same vein as Chet Baker." *Mark Keating, Editor, Sound Views Magazine*

"...She plays her tender voice like a musician trying to get the best out of some favored, old horn." *Edward Hill/The Cleveland Plain Dealer*

"...Yet another voice in the retro-cool school—almost at times, as cool as Julie London, but with a serpentine edge." *Gary Giddins/The Village Voice*

"...Continental and sophisticated, McCarthy is as much chanteuse as jazz singer." *Carlo Wolff/Jazz Journalist, Author*

"...Nora McCarthy delivers with the improvisational intuition of Betty Carter and the compassion of Billie Holiday. McCarthy tackles harmonically complex material of Thelonius Monk with relative ease then easily slips into a relaxed Latin style that owes much to Brazilian samba queen Astrud Gilberto." *Edward Hill/The Cleveland Plain Dealer*