

# Judi Silvano

Vocalist, Composer, Lyricist

extended bio

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What Judi Silvano has been able to accomplish thus far gives the appearance of multiple artists' careers strung together -- but it's all Judi. In fact, she's always got a new project ready to fly, oftentimes dovetailing and overlapping her previous efforts.

Born in Philadelphia, with a degree (in both Music and Dance) from Temple University, Judi made her way to New York City in 1976 where she launched her career as an improviser -- of dance at first. But jazz would not be far behind.

An alchemist of music and movement, her career as a choreographer and dancer led her straight to NYC's downtown music scene where her improvisational spirit could run free. It also steered her toward what would become a long-term collaboration with saxophonist Joe Lovano that began in 1980 and continues to this day. Their like-minded approach to creativity through collaboration has fueled both of their creative spirits.

Throughout the '80s, you could also find Judi on any given Monday night at the Village Vanguard where the Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra held forth, soaking in the great charts of Thad Jones. Before long, Judi could sing along with all the lead trumpet parts. You can trace the roots of her unique horn-like approach to vocalizing directly to this experience.

To date, Judi Silvano has eleven recordings to her credit, including 1997's "Vocalise" (Blue Note). She's led multiple vocal groups from Voices of Juniper to Voices Together, won numerous awards and grants (Meet the Composer, New York State Council on the Arts), been named as one of the Top 10 Vocalists in Down Beat magazine four times, has been a jazz journalist/columnist (All About Jazz) and has been the subject of an original composition ("Sketches for Silvano" by Lori Dobbins).

As a gifted educator with a great heart (that comment comes straight from her students), Ms. Silvano has passed on her knowledge and experience to a multitude of young musicians both privately and through her Vocal Improv workshops in NYC, and at such esteemed institutions as Banff International

Center for the Arts and Rutgers University. As a progressive composer and arranger, Judi Silvano's work has been recognized by the industry in many ways, including taking First Prize in The Brooklyn Lager Band Search with judging for the Search led by trumpeter Lester Bowie. Silvano dons the "Producer's Hat" quite often. Her most recent efforts include annual Thelonious Sphere Monk Birthday Celebrations featuring the composer's amazing songs with lyrics by Jon Hendricks, Mike Ferro, Sally Swisher among others. After the 9-1-1 events when lower Manhattan was almost shut down, she began offering a monthly series at NYC's Cornelia Street Cafe, where her presentations featuring established and emerging vocalists, spanning a deliciously eclectic array of themes including: "Improvisational Journey", "A Tribute to Monk", "Sephardic Meets Jazz", "New Songs for Singers" (which included 14 singers presenting new repertoire), and with jazz journalist Lara Pellegrinelli, an evening of alternative lyrics to songs entitled "Strangers in the Night - An Evening of Uncommon Lyrics to the Great American Songbook".

The roster of musicians with whom Silvano has collaborated, performed, recorded and/or toured reads like a Who's Who of Jazz. A short list of these stellar artists includes Kenny Werner, Joe Lovano, Ratzon B. Harris, Bill Frisell, Paul Motian, Charlie Haden, Tim Hagans, Jack DeJohnette, Erik Friedlander, George Garzone, Billy Drewes, Al Foster, Manny Albam, Dave Holland, Dave Douglas, Mike Formanek, Gerry Hemingway, Michael Abene, Rufus Reid, Ingrid Jensen, Dick Oatts and Newman Taylor Baker - and that's just the tip of the iceberg. She's performed at a multitude of festivals and concert houses around the globe, including the Montreal, Paris, London, Verona, Perugia, Istanbul, Xalapa, Langnau Switzerland and North Sea Jazz Festivals as well as the JVC Jazz Festival in NY.

Two of Silvano's recordings are surprising and healing. "Sound Garden - Spirit Music" (JSL) is the first in a series of CDs of music for healing meditation that Judi improvised on flute, alto flute, alto recorder, voice and percussion in collaboration with Joe Lovano who played gongs, shakuhachi wood flute, bass clarinet percussion. "Sound Garden - Celestial Voices" (JSL) is a lush and earthy soundscape of women's voices that shows Silvano's roots as a choral singer expanded into arrangements for voices and flutes. Chronogram Magazine said "This disc transcends the conventional relaxation recording and is a truly glorious disc!"

"Let Yourself Go" (ZOHO) is a loving birthday gift to her mom of her favorite standards with sextet arrangements by Michael Abene featuring Ingrid Jensen, Rufus Reid and Dick Oatts and was voted on several Top 10 lists including the Montreal Journal by Len Dobbin.

2005 started and continued as a whirlwind of music and travel. Danilo Perez invited Judi to his 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Panamanian Jazz Festival as part of Joe Lovano's Street Band (see photos) then came back to NY and did a concert of "Sound Garden Meditation Music" (see Recordings page) playing flutes & percussion with Joe on woodwinds and Salvatore Bonafede on piano at the Hudson View Gardens series and then took part in the Lester Young celebration "To Prez With Love" at St. Peters Church.

That Spring, there were two more gigs with the LET YOURSELF GO Sextet with the amazing arrangements of my mother's favorite songs by Michael Abene, conducting from the piano at NY's Jazz Standard Club. At The Dakota in Minneapolis, Dick Oatts flew out with me, and we played with some fine musicians there: Laura Caviani, Dave Jensen, Jeff Rinear, Gordy Johnson and Phil Hey. The Jazz Police's Andrea Carter took lots of photos.

On the Educational front, Silvano taught a 6-week Studio Works' program for Teens at Risk in New Jersey, presented an Alumni Panel discussion on the integration of music and dance in my work at her alma mater Temple University in Philadelphia, presented a discussion of the musical research and recording process for Provost Research Day at Rutgers University where she had taught voice for 10 years, taught a workshop on Vocal Improvisation & Lyrics Interpretation at an upstate High School and was guest lecturer at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. Whew!

Some other highlight performances include headlining with her LET YOURSELF GO band at the "Willie the Lion Smith" Goshen Festival in upstate New York, singing at Caramoor Festival in Joe Lovano's "Celebrating Sinatra" ensemble, being part of a Memorial Tribute to Steve Lacy at Merkin Hall hosted by Roswell Rudd (featuring George Lewis, Thomas Buckner, Dave Leibman, Bobby Few, Irene Aebi, John Betsch and Joe Lovano among others) and Dizzy's Club Coca Cola for a week of late-night sets with the wonderful Janice Friedman on piano.

Perhaps the most amazing event of that winter, however, was bringing her WOMEN'S WORK Quartet to Rome, Italy for the "Donne In Musica Winter Festival". It was the first time she formed an all-female ensemble to present the music she had been researching and playing since 2003, usually during the month of March for Women's History Month. Here was a chance to present the band in a concert format, hosted by a foundation devoted to presenting the music of women composers from around the world, and we were among the first of the groups to represent the jazz idiom. It all came together right up to the standing ovation we got and I knew at that moment that I had to record the group, because it felt so good!!!! It was a special night also because the great Italian musicians Giovanni Thomasso and Tony Scott came to support us!!!

2006 came in with the IAJE and one last gig at Birdland with the LET YOURSELF GO Sextet... Michael Abene had written great arrangements of her mother's favorite Standard songs for the CD and most of the band from the recording made the date! There was some great playing by Rufus Reid, Dick Oatts, Newman Taylor-Baker, Ingrid Jensen, Jamie Baum, Dan Silverman and course the Maestro Abene! That winter, Silvano also joined a really fun band, Chris Sullivan's "New Orleans Jazz Express" and they played some Cajun music for the revelers at Bodles Opera House in Chester, NY and around the Hudson Valley.

Silvano played with so many wonderful musicians all year, but some of the highlights were going to Paris to play at the Sunside Club with the great Bobby Few and John Betsch in their adopted hometown, going to Boston to play at Ryles with Pat Adams and finally get to experience the superb Ray Santisi tinkle those ivories, playing 4 times with many top NYC musicians at the Bacchus Room while it was still happening, such as John DiMartino, Mary Ann McSweeney, Ratzon B. Harris, Adam Kolker, Kenny Wessel, Todd Isler and Linda Presgrave.

One very memorable concert in the summertime was an outdoor pavillion in the famed Storm King Art Center in the mid-Hudson valley. It was a beautiful day and the band was Peter Einhorn on guitar, Chris Sullivan on bass and a favorite surprise, Joe Lovano on drums! Now there was an exuberant lesson in rhythm.

Another big event for me in 2006, is that I was again awarded a NYSCA Grant for my educational work with music and dance. The project which

originated in 2004 as “Voices Together” became “Pathways to Music and Dance”. I led 7 Workshops for people of all ages to share in their love of music and movement with the assistance of several music and dance educators. We created a place to play and had delighted people from 5 to 75 dancing and making music together in the libraries and art centers that hosted the workshops. Please see my Projects page for more about this kind of work.

I was fortunate to have 2 Big Band experiences in 2006. The first was with the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, with whom Joe Lovano had begun working the year before on a project. Their bassist, Dave Morgan arranged original material that he wrote and some songs by Joe and by me for their repertoire. He arranged my tunes Bougainvillea and Bass Space. We played 4 nights at Birdland in NYC and recorded an album of some of the charts. It was a thrill and honor for me as a composer to hear my songs arranged for this band and to share it with our audiences.

The other Big Band in my life that year is led by master trumpeter and arranger, Tim Hagans, with whom I shared the front line in Joe Lovano’s Universal Language band in the 1980’s. Tim has led the Norrbotten Big Band in Lulea, Sweden for 10 years, and has developed the band into an excellent ensemble. He also arranged 3 of my tunes (Make It A Classic, Heuchera Americana and Bougainvillea) for the band and we did a tour from the famed Fasching Club in Stockholm to the Nefertiti Club in Goteborg and up to a small town near the Arctic Circle. It was amazing for me to realize how much Tim had influenced my improvising by playing with him so much in my early days in New York, and to be back together improvising with him and Joe Lovano every night was a very deeply moving experience. And fun!

While it couldn’t get much better than that, it did in a way. On the way back to New York, Joe and I stopped in Tallinn, Estonia for what we hope will be our first visit there. Master bassist Toivo Unt, who has played with many US musicians, helped to organize a series of Master Classes for Joe and I for students and young professionals at a local music school and hosted a jam session every night. They were a wonderful group of musicians! Then we played a concert for the JazzKaar Festival with an ensemble of mixed US (drummer Brian Melvin and bassist Peter Barshay) and Estonian (guitarist Jaak Soar and pianist Jurmo Espere) musicians. It was held in a beautiful old concert hall and the crowd made a Tuesday feel like Saturday night!

Music is truly the universal language and the more I travel and share the magic with people whose hearts are open to sharing this music, the more I feel encouraged that the world will somehow survive all the crazy politics and wars and struggles people engage in with each other.

A long weekend up to Boston was a mini-festival of playing with one of my other favorite saxophonists, George Garzone! His Trio "The Fringe" (who have been playing together every week for 30 years) invited me to sit in with them for a little gig at the Lily Pad and then I had them join me for my gig at Ryles Jazz Club with the great Joe Lovano joining us. After singing arrangements of Standards for a sextet to support my last CD project, it was great fun to do 2 nights of mostly Improvisation with some masterful improvisers!!! We'll be back up in Boston again soon, so keep an eye out for us and go hear The Fringe whenever you can, they are incredible.

I taught a Master Class at the famed Manhattan School of Music, and had the pleasure of working with their Vocal Masters students. I continue teaching voice at Rutgers University's Newark Campus and at Newburgh Performing Arts Academy in the Mid-Hudson Valley. So, the end of 2006 was filled with family and love and music and I have so many blessings in my life, I look forward to 2007 with great hope.

2007 has already started out in a good way. I'm deep into the production of my new CD "Women's Work", which will be released in JUNE. It's a very exciting project of under-recorded compositions by some of America's great composers who happen to be women. The band is made up of the ensemble that I took to Rome, Italy last year, and they are Janice Friedman on piano, Jennifer Vincent on bass and Allison Miller on drums and these ladies together are a powerhouse of swing and groove! We recorded LIVE at Sweet Rhythm last year. We play works by Mary Lou Williams, Abbey Lincoln, Sheila Jordan, Carla Bley, Blossom Dearie, Bessie Smith, Meredith d'Ambrosio, a few songs of mine and one by Janice Friedman that I wrote lyrics for. Keep on the look-out for this CD Release in mid-year and on the internet scene. I'm so excited because the music really gets you dancing and I want to share the fun!!!

We had lots of gigs with this fabulous repertoire and I relished speaking with Abbey Lincoln and Sheila Jordan frequently about their songs that I was singing as part of the program. It meant so much for me to study their works

and they reciprocated that it was wonderful for younger singers to keep their songs alive. I still have some of their phone messages that I just can't erase!

And we got some good reviews. "Silvano and company are in fine form, obviously having a ball with this material going from softly introspective to joyfully buoyant and delightfully saucy." (Chris Loudon, Jazz Times).

I kept working with the "Women's Work" group for several years and Janice Friedman on piano especially kept the band swinging hard and I hired Jennifer Vincent on bass and Allison Miller on drums whenever they could make a gig. It gave me a chance to play with some other talented women musicians around NYC, too, including Mary Ann McSweeney, Bernice "Boom Boom" Brooks, Miriam Sullivan, Linda Presgrave and "Sweet" Sue Terry when I started to add a horn. A continuation of this project is already in the works with songs by such composers as Melba Liston, Bertha Hope, Sarah Cassey, Jane Herbert Hall, Peggy Lee, Renee Rosnes and others. One day there will be a Women's Work Volume II! There is much to study!

"Silvano's immense musicality blooms on her recent "Cleome: Live Takes" released in 2008 (JSL). Keenly dedicated to her adventuring approach to songcraft, Silvano teams up with a stellar group of collaborators on the album: saxophonist George Garzone, bassist Michael Formanek and drummer Gerry Hemingway (with John Lindberg taking over the bass chair on two tracks). Together they create a vibrant garden of performances and each of the nine songs on "Cleome" stands as an evocative glimpse into the soul of Silvano's creative personality and love of collaboration." Down Beat Magazine gave it 4 stars and said "Vocalist Judi Silvano has guts and takes big risks... singing with rhythmic snap. These are a series of audio snapshots, exciting in their spontaneity." As a whole this release reminds us of the voice's unwavering primacy as a tuneful instrument and of Silvano's genuine gifts in this regard.

2008 – 2011 were busy years. In fact, it's quite a blur! I especially spent a lot of time with my darling mother helping her through many changes in her ability to live alone and many transitions in her living situation and health conditions. I realized that it was a blessing that I could be flexible and spend time with her as she was aging, and I have cherished every moment I had with her. In 2012, she just had her 89<sup>th</sup> birthday... so she is a tough cookie!

I had moved by 2007 to the Hudson River Valley full time and so I stopped teaching Voice at Rutgers University's Newark campus after 10 years and started teaching closer to home, working with youngsters from 5 – 15 years old at the Newburgh Performing Arts Academy. It was a humbling and very challenging task to teach these young people about the language of music and at the same time engage their love of what they were hearing on the radio. It led me to learn more about the Pop music that they knew and I ended up coaching many performances of songs that I had not expected to be working on. I bought lots of sheet music and Karaoke CD's to work on with them and started working on songs in different languages, too. I managed to bring some of the rudiments of music into their awareness and then some of the personalities in the history of Jazz to their attention. I hope as they grow and develop, someday there will be a flicker of recognition that will inspire them from our time together.

I also did a lot of touring in Europe, working in bands mostly with Joe Lovano and it is always a gift to have the opportunity to be on the bandstand with his enormous energy and power. I finally began to be able to harness my own power and intuitive improvisations and find pathways to communicate more directly with the listeners, with or without words, than I had before. Of course, I also had the chance to help support Joe in all of his creative endeavors and to be pleased to share in watching him get some of the recognition I have always felt he deserves. He is a very hard-working guy, gives 110% of himself every time and is very generous with other musicians, without an attitude.

I had the chance, also in the past few years, to bring my own bands and music to some European venues and also of developing my material for teaching Master Classes on "Freeing the Voice" in many university settings. And I continued writing some original songs, although there seems to be less and less time to dream and create and have what we used to call "Session time" lately. Somehow I have managed to write a few new songs and dig into writing lyrics more and I try to take advantage of each special grouping of musicians that I work with to try to bring something fresh and new to the group

I started getting calls to be a side-person and really enjoyed that. Through a tragedy, Kenny Werner wrote a large-scale piece for woodwind ensemble, percussion and soloists including himself plus Joe and I. We premiered "No Beginning, No End" up in Boston at MIT and several years later Jeff

Levenson had the foresight to realize it should be recorded and helped make that become a reality. It was a very difficult process and piece to learn, both emotionally and musically, as it demanded a very different approach to “singing” than I had experienced. My part was conceived of as a narrator of sorts, like a dramatic “high priestess” although it was totally sung, with some beautiful melodic material. Still it was a challenge and in a very low part of my range. The recording was very well received, except for the fact that the NARAS board couldn’t figure out what category to put it in, so it was denied a nomination at the Grammy’s, though I think it warranted an acknowledgement. Ah, these cross-over pieces of creative stuff that doesn’t quite fit into the boxes the world thinks they should fit into.... This is a dilemma for all of us.

I worked a lot with Adam Kolker for quite a few years and together we developed a strong empathy and he embraced many of my original songs, even asking to play my tunes on his gigs! I started playing again with the amazing Ranzo B. Harris and so knew could bring any kind of repertoire to the table. What fun! I brought out some of my old repertoire and re-wrote and/or revised some of them and enjoyed the fruits of collective spontaneous arrangements based on a theme!

For a few years Stefan Bauer, Adam Kolker and Fred Jacobs all called me to be part of their groups, in addition to Joe Lovano, and I got a chance to relax into their musical concepts without having to be the Leader. This was a revelation and long overdue! Adam asked me to sing a few tunes on his Sunnyside recording and Fred and I ended up playing a series of trio gigs in upstate New York with pianist Peter Tomlinson, whom Fred hired to play with us. It felt so good that it led me to want to document the trio and as I’ve grown older I have found my favorites among the classics, too.

Thus Judi recorded “Indigo Moods”, released on Jazzed Media Records in April 2012, which shows Silvano able to synthesize her years of singing favored jazz repertoire with her playful sense of improvising! The result is a relaxed and easy-going Trio session with her trusted collaborators on this project, Peter Tomlinson on piano and Fred Jacobs on trumpet. Together they create fresh interpretations of her choice of well-known and timeless songs! The repertoire runs from Duke Ellington, to Antonio Carlos Jobim along with the Gershwin brothers, Hoagy Carmichael, Irving Berlin and more. Songs will be available for download or you can purchase an old-fashioned CD at either [www.jazzedmedia.com](http://www.jazzedmedia.com) or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

You may have to stop and take a deep breath just from reading what Judi Silvano has accomplished to date - but she won't! Judi's ideas, spark, talent and enthusiasm know no limits. Alongside her study of the wealth of material in the jazz library and the composers who provide such rich diversity for our listening pleasure and enrichment, Silvano has continued to create her own Original songs from her personal viewpoint.

While playing many of these originals in live concert settings with noted Pianist / Arranger Michael Abene, there was so much enthusiasm around the project that they decided to go into the studio to document their partnership. This project called "My Dance" features all Silvano originals, arranged spontaneously for just Piano and Voice and was released on JSL Records in 2015. 4 songs had lyrics and 6 songs did not, leaving the story up to the imagination of the listener! There is an exuberance in this duo project, a Beautiful and Passionate collaboration of two daring artists!

Judi was continually writing new songs, creating lyrics to old songs, and arranging a whole different set of her Original Music for her 2-guitar ZEPHYR BAND and doing gigs in NYC. So it was time to plan to document the band and get into the recording studio! She asked close associate Joe Lovano to be her eyes and ears in the control room and he had some great ideas to bring her songs to life in a fresh and happening way! He also played as only he can, on two of Judi's older songs which she had crafted new Lyrics for, and created some of his signature magic on Riding a Zephyr and Dust! After long negotiations with a European label, I'm please to say that you can look for a Spring 2018 release of this 10-song project, half folk/half jazz and All Autobiographical Judi!

While all this was in the works, Judi started playing some sessions with guitar wiz Bruce Arnold (who also is part of the Zephyr Band) and they began improvising some Electro-Acoustic duos with some startling effects!

These two musicians have "chemistry" in abundance. The duets on this recording (some improvised, some composed but arranged spontaneously) show a duo intensely tuned into every nuance as they follow the sonic twists and turns of these 12 striking songs. This is some deep listening.

While **Judi Silvano** may be best known for her extensive jazz catalogue, her passions extend well beyond, to embrace classical and free improv music. Her background in modern dance also adds an underlying spatial physicality.

It is this spatial element that is particularly present here as Silvano utilizes an array of Eventide effects to enhance her sonic imagination.

Hailing from Sioux Falls South Dakota, **Bruce Arnold** has been exploring the potentials of his beloved electric guitar for years, using the program SuperCollider to summon up atmospheric soundscapes. His added fascination with 12 tone and pitch class theory as applied to improvisation lends his playing a distinctive harmonic and melodic voice.

When these two artists decided to see where a duet situation would lead them, both were surprised at the ease with which they created engrossing, evocative music. Judi describes it: “We were able to respond to each other in the moment - in the true spirit of Improvisation. This allowed the sonic landscape to flow towards the compositions that evolved. I love working in this collaborative way.” And so “Listen To This” was born and released in December 2016 (Muse-Eek)

Now they are collaborating with videographer/artist Michal Shapiro on a series of Live Improvisations with Electronics captured on video. Some of these pieces incorporate a Dancer named Maria Mitchell and there will be some YouTube submissions in the near future! It’s bringing Judi back home to her roots of Dance and Music multi-media expression where all the visual, sound and movement arts function together to create a world of exciting and emotional stimuli.

Whew! A wild stream of musical expressions and a Joyous life of collaboration with many other creative souls is a true blessing for all involved. Plus there have been many Paintings that have materialized in Judi’s life of inspiration of the musicians and nature around her.

Please visit Judi’s website [www.judisilvano.com](http://www.judisilvano.com) for her Itinerary to see when she will be bringing her joyful and spirited music to a location near you!

Judi Silvano is off and running again, bringing her abundant talents and tireless spirit to the next endeavor. So, stay in touch for more on this continuing story of Love and Music!

**THE LAST PARA, PLEASE REPLACE TOTALLY WITH THIS NEW ONE, which is in the past tense with some other changes, too---**

**October 5, 2004 was the official release date for Silvano's first all-Standard release "Let Yourself Go" on the new Zoho Music label. October 26<sup>th</sup> was the first CD Release Party at the famed Birdland club in New York City, then November 16<sup>th</sup> at Sweet Rhythm in Greenwich Village and March 21st at The Jazz Standard, an elegant club below the famous Blue Smoke Restaurant. Thanks to all the folks who came out to help us celebrate this release! There has been such enthusiasm about this band we had to have three Release Parties!!! Why not????!!!**

**"Let Yourself Go" has been getting great national radio play and reviews and was voted onto 3 lists of BEST CD's OF 2004!!! They are:**

**Len Dobbins, Montreal Mirror**

**Steve Feeney, Face Magazine, Maine**

**Herb Wong, Jazz Educators Journal/ IAJE**

**To see what the other journalists and critics are saying, go to my REVIEWS page. (LINK)**

**All the musicians and fans who have supported Silvano & Abene's collaboration on this project have been great and everyone knows they'll have a swinging time hearing this band live. There are other dates planned around the country so please check Judi's ITINERARY (LINK) so you can come on out to hear the great little-big-band charts that veteran Michael Abene wrote just for Silvano's outing. Come join the fun!!! And don't forget to go to Amazon or Borders or CDBaby to find this CD.**

**Silvano's other activities over the Winter included attending the IAJE Conference in LA, where she got to hang out with Educators and musicians from around the world! See photos of Judi with Dee Dee Bridgewater and Don Byron on her GALLERY page (LINK). Silvano also played at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Panama Jazz Festival, founded and hosted by piano-great Danilo Perez. She was singing and playing flute as part of Joe Lovano's "Street Band" along with Dennis Irwin, Francesca Mela, James Weidman and Billy Drewes. What a beautiful scene down there thanks to the work of Danilo with help from Ruben Blades and Robin Tomchin and many other lovely people. They all got stuck there an extra day because of a big snowstorm in NY... but don't feel too bad for them, they had a ball!**

**Back on the East Coast, Silvano has been involved in a myriad of teaching and performing activities, from working with high school teens in Newark, bringing bands to Newburgh and Peekskill in upstate New York, planning gigs and Master**

**Classes in Minneapolis/ St. Paul in May and continuing to get more exposure for her  
“Let Yourself Go” band. Onward!!!**

# Judi Silvano

Vocalist, Composer, Lyricist

biography

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Born in Philadelphia, graduated from Temple University, Judi finally made her way to New York City in 1976 and began performing at "Loft" concerts as a modern dancer, working with choreography and improvisation. In 1980, she met and started a long-term collaboration with the deeply imaginative Joe Lovano. Together Judi & Joe created the group "WinDance" and put on a series of Music/Dance concerts at the Washington Square Church. During the early 1980's Judi also taught several Music & Movement Workshops at the New School for Social Research, which trained and encouraged instrumentalists to have body awareness as part of their conception for playing their instruments. This theme of combining music and movement has been a consistent thread throughout Judi's creative life.

Silvano sang many sessions and loft concerts in this period with Scott Lee, Kenny Werner, Tom Rainey, Joe Lovano, Billy Drewes, and Ratso Harris among others. And for many years, every Monday night you could find Judi at the famed Village Vanguard listening to the Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra play the great charts of Thad Jones and this is when she rekindled her love of Big Band music, having grown up in a jazz-loving household. She could sing along with all the Lead Trumpet parts, which directly influenced her unique vocal approach to singing like a horn.

Her first Jazz recording in 1981 was Michael Bocian's FOR THIS GIFT (GunMar Records) in a totally improvised trio piece with Bocian on guitar and Kenny Werner on piano. In 1987, Silvano co-founded JSL Records with Joe Lovano as a way to document some of their work and 1989 was Silvano's first major jazz tour of Europe in Lovano's "Wind Ensemble" with Bill Frisell, Tim Hagans and Paul Motian. A live recording, WORLDS, was released in France and won the Grand Prix Award there, before it was released in the U.S. in 1995 on Evidence Records.

Silvano's first Vocal Group "Voices of Juniper" was formed in 1990 and she began writing vocal arrangements of tunes by Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Haden, Bill Evans, Tom Harrell as well as her own Original songs. She entered the Brooklyn Lager Band Search and the judges, led by trumpeter Lester Bowie, applauding the spirit and originality of Silvano's compositions and arrangements (for Vocal Quartet with rhythm section plus trumpet and tenor sax) awarded her First Prize (to open for Bowie's Brass Fantasy at Brooklyn's Prospect Park with a live broadcast on WBGO radio). Some of this material was recorded on her first CD as a Leader DANCING VOICES (JSL Records) released in 1992.

Silvano went into the studio in 1993 as part of Joe Lovano's ground-breaking session UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE (Blue Note Records) along with Charlie Haden and Jack DeJohnette among others. The group toured Europe playing Lovano's

hard-hitting repertoire to amazed audiences from Scandinavia to Italy. Around the same time Silvano also recorded the works of pianist and composer Kenny Werner on his PAINTINGS (Pioneer) along with Billy Drewes and Erik Friedlander, which was unfortunately only released in Japan.

During 1995 Silvano recorded again on Joe Lovano's RUSH HOUR (Blue Note Records) another cutting-edge project with Gunther Schuller's compositions and orchestrations. Silvano was also featured on a few duo arrangements with Mr. Lovano, where he overdubbed drums and several horns. Joe distilled a Quintet that he called "Symbiosis" featuring the unique combination of Voice and Cello and they toured the U.S. and Europe and rocked the IAJE convention in Atlanta, Georgia.

In 1997, Judi's Major Label debut as a Leader was VOCALISE (Blue Note Records) and that same year, she began teaching Voice at Rutgers University's Newark Campus. Once again she had the amazing experience of feeling a great rhythm section, this time George Mraz and Al Foster, when Arranger/Conductor, Manny Albam wrote her voice into the ensemble on Joe Lovano's CELEBRATING SINATRA (Blue Note Records).

April 1998 was the premier of a composition written for her by composer Lori Dobbins called "Sketches For Silvano", a contemporary classical piece with a bebopish theme, for Voice, Vibes and Percussion. The first movement was released on INSPIRATIONS (Capstone Records) as part of the Society of Composers' series.

That summer, Silvano first joined the faculty of the Banff International Centre for the Arts' Summer Jazz Workshop under the Directorship of her colleague Kenny Werner, and she returned to teach talented young musicians from around the world and perform there with other Faculty (such as Dave Holland, Kenny Werner, Joe Lovano and Dave Douglas) for 4 summers in the spectacular Canadian Rockies. Silvano also began teaching a Yoga & Stretch class in the early morning hours, to support everyone's awareness of how important the physical body is to making music.

The October 2000 release of Silvano's SONGS I WROTE OR WISH I DID (JSL Records) featured the great Victor Lewis on drums, Larry Goldings on organ, Vic Juris on guitar, Essiet Okun Essiet on bass, and special guest Joe Lovano on two tunes. This is a swinging set with songs by Bob Dorough, Billy Strayhorn, Thad Jones/Abbey Lincoln, Myrow & DeLange, Emil Boyd/Hale Smith, Myriam Alter, Jane Hall and some of Silvano's original songs and lyrics. Other highlights of the year were a sold out CD Release Party at the famed Blue Note Club in New York City, a great West Coast Tour and being voted onto Down Beat Magazine Reader's Poll Top Ten Jazz Vocalists again!

November 2000 was Silvano's first European tour as Leader, and while in Brussels she went into the recording studio with the eminent Pianist/Composer Mal Waldron for a duo session. She had studied many of his lesser-known works, written during

his years as a staff writer for Prestige Records and she wrote lyrics to several of them. It was great to experience his compositions directly with the Source, (especially the magical “Soul Eyes”) and to play with such a mature and supportive accompanist. RIDING A ZEPHYR (Soul Note/Black Saint Records) didn’t come out until November 2002 on the esteemed Italian label.

2001 was a big year and brought a commission from the Muhlenberg College Dancers, in collaboration with choreographer Susan Creitz. This project "Travellin' Without A Clue" featured 15 dancers plus an ensemble made up of a 12-voice choir, percussionist and flute, with Judi conducting it all for 4 exciting shows!

There were also several appearances in NYC of Silvano’s New Music Quartet “Cleome” featuring bassist Michael Formanek, drummer Gerry Hemingway and saxophonist George Garzone, notably at the famed Knitting Factory. This group, dedicated to the spirit of collective improvisation, has a CD in the works.

Silvano taught at some prestigious Summer Workshops, including the Banff International Jazz Workshop again, Janice Borla's Vocal Jazz Camp in the Chicago area, and then at the Lake Placid Music Seminar in upstate New York with Jim McNeely, Bob Brookmeyer, Rufus Reid, Billy Hart and Joe Lovano.

When 9-1-1 happened in September of 2001, things kind of shut down in New York City. Everyone was so horrified by what had happened and it was a challenge for musicians to continue working and to get audiences to come out. Silvano decided to present a series of concerts to put out some positive energy. This was the beginning of Judi wearing the "producer's hat" and it evolved into “Judi Silvano’s Vocal Series” at the Cornelia St. Café in Greenwich Village. That first year, Silvano presented emerging vocalists and invited peers that she admired to join her and created some beautiful collaborations with 3 singers harmonizing and trading together. Some themes were Standards & Oldies (with Roz Corral & Marty Elkins), Brazilian music (with Maucha Adnet & Kate Baker), Free Improvisation (with Ellen Cristie) and “New Songs For Singers” featuring 14 different singers on the New York scene. It was packed and it was a hit!

Also in 2002, Silvano offered a series of Vocal Improvisation workshops in NYC, and found a large appetite among singers for this kind of training. Soon she created her second vocal ensemble “Voices Together”. The core group of invited vocal musicians (Kyoko Kitamura and Marlana Primavera) worked with Silvano’s visualization of music and stage movement as multi-media theatre. They did 4 gigs at the Knitting Factory to enthusiastic crowds and sometimes invited Guests to join the Core Group for vocal improvisations and Silvano originals. A few months later Judi invited dancer & choreographer Maria Mitchell to become a regular member of the ensemble. Things really came together with music and dance together again! A concert at a SoHo Gallery called “The Puffin Room”, as part of their “Winter Performance Series” had a packed house. Workshops in schools and other concerts

followed and the “Voices Together” group developed a following. For more information see Notables. [\[LINK\]](#)

In May 2002, the publisher of AllAboutJazz, asked Silvano to write a column about her views about being a Vocal Jazz artist. It was an honor and challenge to put thoughts down on paper for nine (9) monthly articles about the complex workings of creative life. Periodically, she has contributed special articles to AAJ.

Summer of 2002, Silvano Mastered her first CD of music for Yoga, Meditation and Massage. Since Silvano has been practicing yoga and receiving massages and acupuncture treatments for quite some time, she wanted to create a soundscape that she could relax and breathe with. She enlisted Joe Lovano and they did a series of duo sessions, live to DAT, with Judi playing flute, alto flute, alto recorder, voice, percussion & gongs, and Joe playing bass clarinet, bass recorder, wood flute, percussion & gongs. The resultant recording is a peaceful disc and while the music is totally improvised and melodic, it is not hard-hitting jazz. SOUND GARDEN-SPIRIT MUSIC was released in late 2003 on their own JSL Records label. (Please visit [www.jslrecords.com](http://www.jslrecords.com)) [\[LINK\]](#)

Silvano did a Fall 2002 tour to Los Angeles playing several venues with the tasty rhythm section of Theo Saunders, Tony Dumas and Ralph Penland. Then, a 3 week tour with Joe Lovano’s “Viva Caruso Street Band” all through England with a special gig at the London Festival and stops in Madrid, Berlin and Budapest. Silvano sang half the tunes, and played flute on the other compositions featuring of the “opera house” string and woodwind sound with bandmates Gil Goldstein, Billy Drewes and Gary Valente.

Elder statesman and Grammy-winning Vocalist Mark Murphy was so excited about what he saw and heard at “Silvano’s Vocal Series”, that he asked Silvano to produce a concert of all his compositions and lyrics. So there were 2 nights of Mark Murphy’s music on December 7 & 8, 2002 with 8 wonderful singers interpreting his material! The “Judi Silvano Vocal Series” keeps resurfacing so if you’re in NYC, keep an eye out for further concerts in the series & come down!

RIDING A ZEPHYR, Silvano’s duo recording with pianist and composer MAL WALDRON, was finally released in November 2002 on the Italian label Soul Note/Black Saint Records and is available at the Recordings page. [\[LINK\]](#) It got a wonderful reception by both critics and radio hosts around the country. But the tour to support the CD release was curtailed when Mal died unexpectedly on December 2, 2002, just 3 weeks after the CD was released. Dr. Herb Wong listed this CD among his Top Blue Chip Award Vocal CD’s for 2002, published in the IAJE Journal and it received many wonderful reviews.

2003 was a very busy year with several notable “Tributes to Mal Waldron”: a poignant duo concert with the wonderful pianist Frank Kimbrough at the Falcon

**Art Center in the Mid-Hudson Valley and then a gig at the famed Birdland Club in NYC, with James Williams, piano, Don Braden, sax, Ed Schuller, bass & Billy Drummond, drums. Since Silvano had applied for and was awarded two Meet The Composer grants to help produce this date, she had Mal's grant transferred to his daughter (Mala Waldron) and so both Judi & Mala presented their own original compositions and lyrics in conjunction with the great compositions and lyrics that Mal had left us all! It was a magical evening.**

**Silvano also did another series in February 2003 with the Muhlenberg College Dance Department, in collaboration with choreographer Susan Creitz. Creitz fell in love with Silvano's composition "Dust" which she'd just recorded with Mal, so they adapted it to her dance. This time there was not only a student vocal choir, but also the accomplished pianist Dave Leonhardt to accompany the 17 dancers, with Silvano singing and conducting it all!**

**This was a year of Poetry & Spoken Word for Silvano. She worked closely with poet Leanne Averbach on a series of Poetry & Jazz concerts (at the Bowery Poetry Club, the Knitting Factory and the Cornelia St Café Poetry Series. Also, poet Golda Solomon invited her to be a special Guest on her "Po'Jazz (Poetry + Jazz)" monthly Poetry series. In addition, Silvano was invited to sing with bassist Andy McKee at the "Literature Live" events at the new Knitting Factory (curated by Nick Birns).**

**Judi worked closely for months with veteran arranger/pianist Michael Abene on developing charts to record some of her mother's favorite Standard songs in celebration of her 80th birthday. This project was a way of paying tribute to the woman who gave Silvano her appreciation for both music and art. Abene's exciting 3-horn arrangements, written expressly for Judi Silvano's unique talents, were recorded in May 2003 at Sound on Sound in New York City. In addition to the great New York musicians that Silvano hired for this date, she invited her brother Dr. Dan Silverman and her very musical sister Nita Goodgal to be part of the project!!! See [Recordings for more information \[LINK\]](#)**

**Some other highlights of the year: There was a trio gig with Dena DeRose and Scott Lee at Chez Suzette, where Dena sang harmonies on one of Judi's originals, and Judi played flute on one of Dena's originals. They had a wonderful rapport and are working towards doing another date together!**

**Judi also enjoyed playing with the creative pianist Russ Lossing, and did several concerts with Bob Meyer's "Sephardic Meets Jazz" Project, playing Ladino/Spanish melodies from Medieval times. The band included Brad Shepik on guitar, John Menegon on bass and this time with Loren Shoenberg on alto sax, in a decidedly new jazz style. Silvano also brought her new music quartet "Cleome" to the 55 Bar in Greenwich Village, featuring Adam Kolker on sax, Ben Allison on bass & Gerry Hemingway on drums and percussion. She invited vocalist Marlina Primavera to sit in and the sparks were flying! You can photos on Judi's [Gallery Page. \[LINK\]](#)**

**In June, Silvano played a concert under the banner of the JVC Jazz Festival at St Peter's Church as a member of International Women in Jazz organization (IWJ). Silvano contributed several of her original compositions. (You can view of list of Judi Silvano's compositions and lyrics at the [JSL Records website](#).) [LINK]**

**That summer, Silvano became the First Vice President of the newly formed New York Chapter of the Jazz Vocal Coalition (JZVOC), an organization formed to support the vocal jazz community and encourage public appreciation of Vocal Jazz. Her involvement in this organization grew in preparation for many events to be held during the IAJE Convention in NYC in January 2004.**

**July and August saw Silvano on another 3-week European tour, once again, with Joe Lovano's "Street Band", playing major festivals in France, Italy, Scandinavia and ending the tour in Rome. Then they went to Sicily for an extra 4 days to visit friends and relatives and were invited to come back again, in August 2004, to perform a concert for the entire mountain town of Cesaro, with pianist Salvatore Bonafede.**

**Silvano's Vocal Series of concerts at Cornelia St Café continued into the Autumn, most notably with an October Tribute for Thelonious Monk's Birthday. She invited vocalists Teri Roiger and Sarah James (both Monk fans) to join in the celebration, along with John DeMartino, piano, John Menegon, bass, and Bob Meyer, drums making up the rhythm section. They performed an all-Monk evening, and Silvano sang many tunes she'd never tackled before. This gig was documented in Japan's premier Jazz Magazine, [Swing Journal](#), with a photo and a "Report from New York" by journalist and Coltrane enthusiast, Mr. Fuji.**

**The International Women In Jazz (IWJ) was invited to bring the first jazz group ever to perform in the "Donne in Musica" Festival in Frascati, Italy (just outside of Rome) in December 2003. Judi Silvano was an important part of this Ensemble chosen from among the membership, specifically for their abilities as Composers. The response was wonderful and there were some illustrious Italian musicians in the audience, notably Clarinet legend Tony Scott and bassist Giovanni Tomasso. Members of the group were Linda Presgrave on piano, Melissa Slocum on bass, Carol Sudhalter on tenor sax and flute, Dottie Anita Taylor on flute, Andrea Wolper on vocals, Judi Silvano on flute and vocals.**

**2004 came in with a cold wind, but there was heated activity in Silvano's life!!!**

**Silvano's multi-media project VOICES TOGETHER continued it's growth in New York during 2003, with performances and educational workshops in the interactive arts of music, dance and theatre. Silvano applied to the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) for a grant to help fund workshops and performances with this unique ensemble and was awarded an "Arts Community Grant" through NYSCA for a series of performances and workshops for the 2004 year. The group explores Silvano Originals and familiar songs improvisationally, using costumes, stage**

movement and percussion instruments. The core group of 3 Vocalists and 1 Dancer is made up of vocalists Kyoko Kitamura, Marlina Primavera with Judi Silvano, plus dancer & choreographer Maria Mitchell. Additional personnel gives the group flexibility and freshness, so sometimes Silvano invites more vocalists, dancers or instrumentalists to join the group. For more information see [Notables page](#). [LINK]

The IAJE (International Association of Jazz Educators) convention was held in NYC in late January 2004 and Silvano was involved in producing several events as part of the JZVOC (Jazz Vocal Coalition). The organization presented 10 of their Members during concerts spanning 3 nights, so that a total of 30 Vocalists from around the country were presented at New York City jazz clubs, with all the networking opportunities that were generated. To find out more about this young and growing organization, go to [www.jzvoc.org](http://www.jzvoc.org) and please consider becoming a member, whether you are a Jazz Fan or a practitioner of the Vocal Arts.

Another powerful concert in Silvano's Vocal Series evolved from journalist Lara Pelegrinelli's idea to present an evening of Alternative Lyrics to Standard Songs. They worked together with Judi as producer and Lara as curator and put together an evening of humorous and bawdy lyrics that had the audience enthralled and delighted. They called it "Strangers in the Night – An Evening of Uncommon Lyrics to the Great American Songbook". The house was full that February evening, and no-one wanted to leave because they all wanted to hear the songs planned for the second set, which got bawdier as the evening went on! There were memorable performances, most notably by Carline Ray, Mary Foster Conklin, Dean Bowman, Claire Daley and Rich Siegel. And there were notables in the audience too: Helen Merrill, Anne Phillips & Ray Passman were spotted!

Later that Spring, Silvano shared an evening at the Brecht Forum in March with fellow vocalist Kendra Shank. Silvano presented her hard-hitting quartet "Cleome" this time featuring George Garzone on sax, Ed Schuller on bass & Newman- Taylor Baker on drums. They both invited the other to sit in and they all sang together, and the audience was excited by several vocalists onstage together.

May 2004 brought very exciting news!! Judi Silvano signed with a new label called ZOHO Music for the release of her new all-Standards CD called LET YOURSELF GO with little big-band charts arranged by veteran Michael Abene, who conducted from the piano. Visit [www.Zohomusic.com](http://www.Zohomusic.com) and check out her planned October 2004 release.

March is Women's History Month, so Judi put together a special project and celebrated on March 20<sup>th</sup>. Billing the concert as "Women's Songs Played By Women!" the band included Bernice Brooks, drums, Sue Maskaleris, piano & vocal, Mary Ann McSweeney, bass, Jamie Baum, flute, and Judi Silvano, vocals. The only problem was that there was so much great music to play and we had only one set but they played music by Abbey Lincoln, Sheila Jordan, Carla Bley, Mary Lou Williams, Lil Hardin Armstrong, Ann Ronnel, Maria Grever, Meredith

**D'Ambrosio and Bessie Smith! Fantastic, interesting and varied new repertoire and there was a lot of power on that stage!!**

**Spring finally arrived after a very long winter, and Silvano led seven Grant Performances with her "Voices Together" group, funded by a grant from NYSCA (New York State Council for the Arts). The group of 3 vocalists and 1 dancer worked their magic and touched audiences young and old wherever they performed, and there are photos posted on the Gallery page. She also had a 5 day tour at the end of April to Portland, Oregon in collaboration with San Francisco vocalist Cathi Walkup and New Yorker Andrea Wolper, in an "East Meets West" project. Two of the highlights of the trip were getting to hang out with the fabulous vocalist Nancy King and doing a live broadcast with Mary Burlingame on KMHD radio.**

**Summer 2004 found Silvano in the recording studio again, this time creating the next in the "Sound Garden" series of music for Yoga, Meditation and Massage on JSL Records. This new project features her vocal ensemble "Voices Together" with Kyoko Kitamura and Marlena Primavera in Original compositions and improvisations. This work was a dream for Silvano's love of the choral sound and the resulting CD "SOUND GARDEN- Celestial Voices" will be released on JSL Records in October 2004.**

**October 5 is the official release date for Silvano's first all-Standard release "Let Yourself Go" on the new Zoho Music label. October 26<sup>th</sup> is the date for the Release Party at the famed Birdland club in New York City with other dates planned. So if you can get to NYC, please come on out to hear the great little-big-band charts that veteran Michael Abene wrote just for Silvano's outing and help them celebrate!!!**

**Check the Itinerary page [LINK] and Recordings page [LINK] to see what else is cookin! And email me at [silvano@hvc.rr.com](mailto:silvano@hvc.rr.com) for any questions.**

**Peace and Music, JUDI SILVANO.**



**See also BIO – Lewis Porter’s Encyclopedia**

**Judi Silvano**  
**Vocalist, Composer, Lyricist**

**www.judisilvano.com**  
**tel: 914-213-2292**

**JUDI SILVANO** moved to New York in 1976 has been active since then as composer, lyricist, improviser, educator and producer. She was voted a Top 10 Jazz Vocalist in the Down Beat Reader's Poll 3 times, awarded a Meet The Composer Grant in 2003, an Arts Community Grant/ NYSCA in 2004, is First Vice President of the NY Chapter of the Jazz Vocal Coalition (JZVOC) and is a contributing writer to the AllAboutJazz (AAJ) newspaper and internet site.

Her 5 CD's as a leader cover a range of styles: Dancing Voices (JSL Records, 1992), Vocalise (Blue Note Records, 1997), Songs I Wrote Or Wish I Did (JSL Records, 2000), the widely acclaimed Riding A Zephyr, a duo CD with legendary pianist Mal Waldron (Soul Note/ Black Saint Records, 2002), Sound Garden: Spirit Music (Music for Yoga, Meditation and Massage) (JSL Records, 2003) and Let Yourself Go! (Zoho Records, 2004) is her first all- Standards CD with 3-horn arrangements by Michael Abene, to be released in September 2004. Visit [www.zohomusic.com](http://www.zohomusic.com).

Silvano has also been featured on Grammy-winner Joe Lovano's Blue Note CDs, recordings with pianist Kenny Werner, composer Lori Dobbins, guitarist James Emery and on Secret Ellington a CD of newly discovered works by Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn. She has been heard on NPR's "Jazz Set", a BET-TV profile of her band, TV broadcasts of The Montreal Jazz Festival, has sung with Wynton Marsalis at Lincoln Center and under the batons of Gunther Schuller, Manny Albam & Robert Shaw on recordings and at Carnegie Hall.

Silvano tours worldwide leading groups including her STANDARDS QUINTET, a cutting edge quartet called CLEOME featuring George Garzone and VOICES TOGETHER featuring Vocalists and Dancers doing multi-media performances (and workshops in schools). She also produces a Vocal Concert Series in NYC, writes dance scores, collaborates with several poets, has taught at Rutgers University since 1998, at workshops including the Banff International Jazz Workshop, the Lake Placid Institute, Janice Borla's Vocal Jazz Camp and teaches privately. Visit [www.judisilvano.com](http://www.judisilvano.com) for more info.



