

DIANE SCHUUR At 70 BIOGRAPHY

“Schuur digs deep on songs as close to her as skin...Deedles continues to be a force of nature in jazz. A very welcome one.”

C. Michael Bailey / All About Jazz

“Her voice is impressive in its size, range and brightness. A song can suddenly fly up an octave into little-girl squeals, then make a swan dive into the murky depths. She uses her twirling vibrato as rhythmic punctuation. After drawing out a note, she dispenses that vibrato like the cherry on a sundae.”

Stephen Holden / New York Times

A leading vocalist in contemporary jazz, Diane Schuur is as eclectic as she is brilliant. Nicknamed "Deedles" as a child (her mother's endearment), Tacoma-born Schuur grew up steeped in traditional American jazz, courtesy of her parents' formidable record collection with ample LPs by Duke Ellington and Dinah Washington.

Dinah Washington is often listed as Schuur's major vocal influence. She learned the iconic singer's "What a Difference a Day Makes" while still a toddler and began developing her own rich, resonant vocal style. Jazziz Magazine describes her approach as one that encompasses her whole lifetime of singing: "Schuur's vocal chops move from little-girl innocence to bawdy-mama blues in a hair's breadth, but always at the service of the song." Schuur is also an accomplished pianist, accompanying herself onstage, whether leading her own small group, with big band or symphony orchestra.

In creating a special music program in honor of her 70th year, Schuur has hand-picked songs from her vast catalog to present a lyrical biography, spotlighting both her music and memories from a creative, visionary life. From Schuur's early years of finding her voice, to collaborations with jazz, blues, and country giants including Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, Stan Getz, B.B. King, the Count Basie Orchestra, and Vince Gill (to name but a few), the artist shares the music and the moments. ***Diane Schuur at 70: An Evening of Song And Stories*** will include blues, straight-ahead jazz, a slice of gospel, and a few tunes that defy categorization, fashioning a musical blueprint of her current place in time.

Schuur captures the essence of Dinah Washington on her most recent album, with a reflective version of Washington's well-known "This Bitter Earth." Co-produced by Schuur and Grammy winning saxophonist Ernie Watts, the project entitled ***Running On Faith*** features Schuur's piano performance throughout, release date May 8, 2020 on Jazzheads Music Group. On this project, the vocalist creates new versions of songs for which she has a deep-rooted affection. Schuur arranges music by some of her favorite performers and songwriters; from Miles Davis to Carole King to Paul McCartney. According to the artist, "I've been focusing on the condition of our world and chose songs that make a statement about *what is* and also some songs of hope, about *what can be*."

The recording opens with Percy Mayfield's "Walking On A Tightrope" as Schuur sings "the blues and I, we know each other," commencing the arc of this musical journey. In addition to the reprise of the Dinah Washington classic, she remembers her friend Ernestine Anderson who first introduced her to the unifying lyrics of the Miles Davis standard "All Blues," – we are all shades, all hues, all blues. Her often-referenced fondness of classic rock is at the root of the title track, originally recorded by Eric Clapton along with the hard-swinging interpretation of the Paul Simon composition "Something So Right." Introspection brought her to the McCartney/Lennon classic "Let It Be" and Jeff Lynne's "The Sun Will Shine on you." She closes with lone piano on the spiritual "Swing Low Sweet Chariot."

Running on Faith is the follow up to her well-received ***I Remember You: With Love To Stan and Frank***, her debut on Jazzheads in 2014. ***I Remember You*** is an homage to two of her mentors, Frank Sinatra and Stan Getz and also commemorates her "official" discovery by saxophone titan Getz at the 1979 Monterey Jazz Festival. A review of ***I Remember You*** by Victor L. Schermer in All About Jazz states "She consistently combines fine artistic efforts with the pizzazz of an entertainer...her style incorporates both subtle jazz interpretation and the power of rhythm and blues."

Schuur's much-laureled career includes two Grammy Awards---each for Best Jazz Vocal Performance---on ***Timeless*** (1986) and ***Diane Schuur and The Count Basie Orchestra*** (1987). Both were released by GRP Records, the label that had launched her recording career. Schuur scored three additional Grammy nominations for subsequent albums ***Pure Schuur*** and ***Love Songs***, as well as for the individual track "The Christmas Song." Schuur's music has explored almost every locale on the American musical landscape, and her attendant studio collaborations---showcasing her pitch-perfect execution and three-and-a-half-octave vocal range---are a who's who of American originators in a plethora of styles. They include the albums ***Heart To Heart*** with B.B. King and ***Swingin' for Schuur*** with Maynard Ferguson, alongside assorted tracks with Stan Getz, Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, Herbie Hancock, Alison Krauss, Vince Gill, Mark Knopfler and Jose Feliciano, among countless others. Distinguished producers who have joined forces with Schuur include Phil Ramone (***Friends For Schuur***), André Fisher (***Pure Schuur, In Tribute***), Barry Manilow (***Midnight***), Steve Buckingham (***The Gathering***), Dave Grusin (***Schuur Thing, Deedles, Timeless***) Al Schmitt (***Blues for Schuur, Love Walked In***) and Oscar Castro-Neves (***Schuur Fire***).

Schuur's voice is bold and expressive, traversing a straight-ahead brand of jazz in her trademark style---simultaneously romantic and mischievous, radiating soulful passion. And, as noted above, it all started very early in her life; the precocious jazz singer made her stage debut at ten years old, performing at a local Holiday Inn. An audio souvenir of another formative gig is actually captured on her 2008 album, ***Some Other Time***, which contains 11-year-old Deedles' 1964 performance of "September In The Rain." The vintage track displays the template for all the elements present in her mature style today: the alternating qualities of intimate tenderness and outgoing theatricality, the assured sense of rhythm and phrasing, and perfect-pitch sensibility. A touching piece on this recording is the classic Irish "Danny Boy," which opens with a snippet of her mother's voice asking, "Diane, do you know the song *Danny Boy*?" and Schuur responding, "I'm going to record it, Mom. Just for you." Her mother, sadly, never got to hear that 2008 release," as she died of cancer in 1967, when Diane was 13.

The artist has been blind since her premature birth on December 10, 1953, having lost her sight to the disorder Retinopathy of Prematurity. It affected newborns receiving high-oxygen therapy during neonatal intensive care---which was standard practice until, tragically, 1954. She first learned to play piano by ear, picking out tunes on the keys with two fingers at the age of 3. "I sang to myself at night," recalls Schuur. "Mom and Dad would open the door a crack and yell 'Diane, shut up,' so I progressed from there to the closet." By age 6, Schuur was giving regular command performances amid her corduroy jumpers.

Her formal study of piano began while at the Washington State School for the Blind which Schuur attended until she was 11 years old. A significant inspiration came at the age of 12 when her mother brought home an LP by the famed blind pianist George Shearing, ***Concerto for My Love***. Young Diane learned all the pieces (by ear, of course), soaking up the distinctive style of Shearing. Her family arranged a meeting with Shearing during a local stint in Seattle, and she learned from that encounter that a life in music was indeed within her grasp, despite her handicap. Deedles finished her studies in public schools, eventually studying voice at the University of Puget Sound.

After playing clubs around the Pacific Northwest, Schuur's first break came in 1975 at the age of 21, when she did an informal backstage audition for Doc Severinsen during one of *The Tonight Show* bandleader's tour stops at the Seattle Opera House. Severinsen's drummer Ed Shaughnessy was so moved by Diane's talent, he invited her to sing with him at the Monterey Jazz Festival the same year. That performance led to a return, high-profile featured spot at Monterey in 1979, where Stan Getz, captivated by her set, became her mentor and advocate.

"She's just like Sarah or Ella to me," Getz once said about Schuur. "She's taking from the tradition, and what comes out is her own conception and advancement of the tradition." A subsequent invitation from Getz had her participating in an all-star performance at the White House with Dizzy Gillespie, Chick Corea, Jon Faddis, Itzhak Perlman and Getz, filmed for PBS. When GRP Records owner Larry Rosen happened to catch its broadcast, Rosen signed her immediately to GRP, and Schuur's career took off. First Lady Nancy Reagan requested Schuur return for an encore performance in 1984, and she was back in D.C. yet again in 1999, as one of the select musical guests invited to sing for Stevie Wonder at the Kennedy Center Honors (when Wonder received that prestigious award).

Between 1984 and 1997, Schuur made 11 albums for GRP, plus two best-of collections. She went on to record four projects for Concord Records, and experienced a dream come true when Ahmet Ertegun, the legendary founder of Atlantic Records, signed her, resulting in the 1999 release ***Music Is My Life***. She has appeared at Carnegie Hall seven times and has racked up numerous Billboard chart-topping jazz releases. Several classic filmed performances are also available, including ***Ray Charles In Concert with Diane Schuur*** (Image Entertainment), ***Diane Schuur & The Count Basie Orchestra*** (Image Entertainment), and ***Live From Seattle with Maynard Ferguson*** (Paradise Artist Studios).

Over the years, Schuur has participated in many charitable and educational projects. She is a respected educator, conducting clinics and master classes for students of all ages at universities, high schools, and middle schools. A partial list of organizations she has assisted via fundraisers includes Music Doing Good, Inc., The Braille Institute, Northwest African American Museum, World Institute on Disabilities, Betty Ford Foundation, Library For the Blind, Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, and the Jerry Lewis Telethon for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. She can also be seen on the PBS perennial “**Sesame Street**,” explaining (and singing) to Elmo about how she uses braille.

Connecting with audiences is what Schuur does better than anything else, and after five-plus illustrious decades she’s still doing it, on record and in concert. "For the future I plan to continue my reading of American song," reflects Schuur, "paying respect to celebrated writers and polishing their gems in the jazz tradition." And she is, indeed, fulfilling that goal, touring theaters and festivals around the world with her own group.

Additionally, Schuur has a personal library of arrangements for performances with traditional big band and symphony orchestra. She has appeared with Boston Pops, the the Houston Symphony, the Honolulu Symphony, the Detroit Symphony and the Moscow Symphony, the Coachella Valley Symphony as well as the Toledo Jazz Orchestra, the Charleston Jazz Orchestra and the Reno Jazz Orchestra to name just a few. Reviewing one performance with Peter Nero and the Philly Pops Orchestra, All About Jazz declares, "Ms. Schuur surely is among the very best jazz vocalists, and she exemplifies if not redefines the 'diva' category with her warm, often humorous, and relaxed interactions with the audience and the musicians. Her mere presence is enough to make for a memorable evening."

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