

Grace Kelly Bio 2017

As Grace Kelly defiantly reminds us on *The Other One*, a standout number from her 10th Album *Trying To Figure It Out*, which was voted #2 *Jazz Album of The Year* in 2016 Downbeat Magazine Readers Poll, she's not looking to be like anyone else. "Got my own thing," she sings over the song's urban, trance-like groove. Although the singer and saxophone player has been acclaimed by critics and audiences alike as a jazz musician, the track's exhilarating chorus, haunting keyboard hook and brittle electro edge show an artist interested only in playing what she loves labels be damned.

While a current Kelly concert might delight jazz purists with Great American Songbook standards, it could just as easily inspire mainstream listeners with Grace-i-fied takes on the likes of Coldplay's *Magic* or Sia's *Chandelier*. In Dec 2015 Jon Batiste snagged Grace as a regular on *The Late Show* with Stephen Colbert's band, *Stay Human*, playing multiple reeds and singing.

But whatever the style, the 24-year-old winner of "Jazz Artist of the Year" at the 2016 Boston Music Awards and the winner of the 2016 64th Annual Downbeat critics poll "Rising Star Alto Saxophone" and (eighth time named to the poll) spices up the sound with the lyrical and soulful phrasing of her instrument. Kelly, who guested with the Jazz at Lincoln Centre Orchestra as part of the events surrounding Barack Obama's inauguration celebration at the request of the ensemble's director, Wynton Marsalis - remains as committed to superior playing as ever. Grace has performed over 800 concerts as a leader in over 30 countries in venues such as Hollywood Bowl, Montreal Jazz Festival, Newport Jazz Festival, Carnegie Hall, Boston Symphony Hall, Montreux and many more. Grace has performed and/or recorded with Harry Connick Jr, Wynton Marsalis, Dave Brubeck, Steve Martin, Tina Fey, Martin Short, Maya Rudolph, Emma Stone, Lin Manuel, Questlove, Esperanza Spalding, Lee Konitz, Phil Woods, Ron Carter, David Sanborn, Marcus Miller, Dianne Reeves, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Huey Lewis and Gloria Estefan to name a few.

For Kelly, evolution is part of the jazz artist's credo.

"I'm a very strong believer that jazz is about improvisation and about creating and spontaneity," Kelly once said in an interview. "That's what really drew me to it, but I think there's plenty of music that can fuse elements of jazz with its own type of sound whether it's rock or pop. I'm not into 'No, this isn't jazz.' I like everything that's good and I encourage people to think that way."

Kelly says she has been well served by applying those same jazz concepts to the personal demands of everyday life. "I really take the concept of improvisation and spontaneity in the music, and I live it," she said.

That personal readiness for anything accounts, in part, for the open-spirited nature of her art. "I try to say yes as much as possible," Kelly says. "If you have a closed idea of what you want in your head, and it's only going to go this way from - A to B to C - you miss a lot of other things that could be popping up. And because you have such a small mind frame, you won't be able to see those great opportunities."

Drawn to jazz by melodic players like Stan Getz and Paul Desmond, Kelly also found in the music a freedom to express herself that she had not found in her classical piano lessons. *Née* Grace Chung in Wellesley, Mass., in 1992, Kelly started taking clarinet lessons in Grade 4 but quickly switched to alto sax at the age of 10. She was soon transcribing Charlie Parker and Miles Davis pieces.

Kelly recorded her first album, *Dreaming*, when she was 12. Even on that debut release, the music pointed to her future eclecticism by mixing the pure pop of *On My Way Home* with selections like the Beatles' *Can't Buy Me Love*, a medley of *Blue Skies* and *In Walked Bud* and the self composed odd-meter jazz instrumental *G-Bop*.

"My way has always been a mix of music I've listened to and loved, including jazz, pop and blues," Kelly says. "Even when I made that first album, I was a total Broadway kid, so some of that even creeps in."

Times Too (2005) was an ambitious double disc that mostly paid homage to jazz standards on its first half and explored classic Beatles and Stevie Wonder, along with some innocent and catchy originals, on its second. *Every Road I Walked* (2006) followed, further refining Kelly's ability to blend genres. Self-penned tracks like *Philosophical Flying Fish*, with its second-line groove, and the easily accessible charmer *Finish Line* sounded quite at home with a sweet and sensitive reading of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, a winning excursion into bossa nova with *Samba de Verao* and a lightly funky *Summertime*.

Kelly, 14 at the time of the album's release, received the first of her five (5) ASCAP Foundation Jazz Composers Awards for the title track and was invited to perform with the Boston Pops. For the occasion, she wrote her first full orchestral arrangement, adapting the award winning piece.

Lee Konitz, the influential composer and alto sax player, who had been Kelly's teacher and mentor since she was 13, became her collaborator on the 2008 release *GRACEfulLEE*, which featured the two stretching out with a stellar band made up of guitarist Russell Malone, bassist Rufus Reid and drummer Matt Wilson. An almost 10minute take on Konitz's *Thingin'*, the stately, jointly-composed title track and taut, unaccompanied improvised miniatures like *Alone Together* and *Buzzing Around* were among the highlights. The album was a critical triumph as well, drawing a 4-and-1/2-star review in the jazz bible *Downbeat*, an endorsement that later earned it a spot in the magazine's *Best Albums of the 2000s* issue. "Her duet with Malone on *Just Friends* is stunning in its simplicity and feeling how can a teenager communicate this depth of expression?," the publication's Michael Jackson wrote in his appraisal.

Mood Changes, released in 2009, found Kelly playing tenor, alto and soprano sax on her most self-assured work to that point. The bouncy, swinging Happy Theme Song set a celebratory, searching tone best showcased in smart, inventive arrangements of Comes Love, Ain't No Sunshine and I Want To Be Happy.

A second auspicious studio collaboration followed when another alto sax legend, Phil Woods, 80 at the time, teamed up with Kelly, then 18, for The Man With the Hat (2011), which also brought a tour to promote the album. Master and protégée traded ideas on four of the disc's seven performances, including the swinging title track and a stunning reading of Billy Strayhorn's Ballad For Very Sad and Very Tired Lotus Eaters.

"We jammed together through I'll Remember April," Woods said of his first musical encounter with Kelly. "How did she sound? I gave her my hat! That is how good she sounded! She is the first alto player to get one. Hooray for the future of jazz and the alto sax!"

Kelly added to her musical palette later that year by releasing the reflective jazz-gospel set Grace, most of which featured her and inspirational jazz pianist George Russell Jr. putting their own stamp on traditional spirituals, without further accompaniment. Among the few exceptions, Kelly's melodic overdubbed solo piece Grace Alone and a joyous, infectious Let There Be Peace on Earth with percussionist Jamey Haddad from Paul Simon's band were every bit as satisfying.

By then, the music sounded as if it were coming from a deeper place.

"I really believe in universal energy and vibrational energy, and I think music comes from that place," Kelly says. "So it would be safe to say that music is my religion."

Kelly also graduated from the Berklee College of Music in 2011, with a degree in professional music. She has taught residency workshops there since 2012. That year also brought another important opportunity to pass on her musical knowledge: the U.S. State Department sent her on an international speakers tour to be an ambassador of jazz and educate the people of Madagascar and the Comoros Islands about the music.

"The folks in the Comoros Islands had never heard of legends like Louis Armstrong or Miles Davis," Kelly said. "It was a challenging and exciting task."

The dynamic 2013 Live at Scullers disc offered a country-flavoured original, Kiss Away Your Tears, among other self-penned performances and a couple of jazz standards. The 2014 EP Working For the Dreamers featured gems like the urban, soft R&B of Touched By An Angel and the pulsating electro beat of Cold Cold Water, keeping the momentum of change in the foreground of Kelly's creative agenda.

Trying To Figure It Out, released in February 2016, finds Kelly once again following her restless artistic spirit. The new work explores, in her words, "the world of jazz and beyond." Fittingly, the album's musical setting shifts from acoustic, conventional jazz (as typified by her touching version of Somewhere Over the Rainbow, a live favourite) to a genre-bending approach, with more contemporary production values.

Blues For Harry Bosch perfectly illustrates the concept, appearing in two versions - as a retro-jazz piece with a film noir-ish feel and as a thoroughly contemporary remix with a clubby trance groove. The track was written for the Emmy-nominated Amazon Prime series Bosch, in which Kelly will appear when the jazz-loving title character, an L.A. homicide detective, stops into Catalina's Jazz Club in Hollywood to see her perform during the show's second season.

Artists ranging from Randy Brecker to Huey Lewis have praised Kelly. Jazz and mainstream media including Jazz Times, All About Jazz, the L.A. Times and CNN have raved about her music. Headlining over 700 shows in 30 countries at all major jazz festivals, from Montreux to Newport to Montreal, have drawn more fans with each year. Awards continue to come. But Kelly says she has never lost sight of a larger picture.

"I think everybody comes to life with a calling," Kelly says. "I've been super blessed that my calling in life has been music and that I found it from an early age. But what I really hope my music brings to people is healing. There's nothing that makes me feel better than when somebody, after a show, says 'You lifted me up.'" Is it the main reason she plays? Her response comes without hesitation: "It's the only reason."



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