



FEATURED ARTISTS



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A bit of everything



You've heard of the Renaissance man.

Well, forget the "man" part and meet **Jessica Lee**, who's been referred to as "attorney, financial analyst, business consultant and jazz singer." You certainly don't see that combination often.

Let's start with the jazz singer part of the equation. Jessica will unveil her first solo album, "Bluebird Fly," with a release party on Saturday at Dowe's on 9th in Pittsburgh,

Jazz and blues aficionados who know Jessica from her weekly Entrepreneurial Thursdays at Dowe's will welcome an opportunity to hear a CD's worth of her smooth, well-phrased vocals set against the backdrop of a crack band with crystal-clear production. And it's all done with local talent.

"We really wanted to do a Pittsburgh-based project," Jessica says, "because we have some great musicians in this area."

Check out clips from "Bluebird Fly" in our Sound Files

Several worked on this project, including versatile guitarist Danny Shields; **John D'Amico**, who did the arrangements along with playing keyboards (he also teaches jazz at Carnegie Mellon); drummer Andy Reamer; and Chris Hemingway, and young up-and-comer who played alto sax on the album's opener, a smoky reading of the Peggy Lee/Bennie Goodman classic "Why Don't You Do Right."

On bass for much of the album is Hollis Greathouse, who also co-produced along with Jessica and Hollis' partner at **Audible Images Recording Studios**, Jay Dudd. You may recognize Jay as a Grammy winner for his work with singer **Nancy Wilson**.

"I'm really, really happy about the project. It shows all the influences I've come from," Jessica says, agreeing that the album is an eclectic mix - jazz, blues, ballads and a bit of

rock 'n' roll via relaxed covers of "Son of a Preacher Man," popularized by Dusty Springfield, and "My Baby Left Me," by way of Elvis. (Roy Ruzika, co-executive producer with his wife, Joan, plays some cool guitar on the latter.)

Nashville producer Luke Wooten helped in the selection of material and brought in an original, "Right Place Right Now," from Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame member **Rory Bourke** and partner Jon McElroy. Luke wanted Jessica to record the project down there in Tennessee, but she opted for the hometown approach.

"A lot of people advised me I'd have to move to Nashville or New York City," she says. "I don't think I have to."

A big reason is the other part of that "Renaissance woman" mix. Jessica is extremely well-versed in the business end of music and has some big visions that could help make Pittsburgh another one of those meccas for music.

Entrepreneurial Thursdays, launched four years ago, provide a taste of what she has in mind. The concept is to combine jazz shows featuring local artists with between-set sessions featuring Jessica talking with members of the business community; as she says, it's a case of "music promoting innovation."

She got the idea from a rumor that somewhere in Silicon Valley was "a club where more deals were done than in the board rooms." She never verified the story, but the concept intrigued her. So she talked about it with Pittsburgh jazz veteran Al Dowe and his wife, Etta Cox, as something for their fledgling club. And today, it's flourishing.

Along those lines is the concept for America's Music Center, which just might help provide an answer to the question: "Isn't there a way we can use music to attract and retain young people?"

In today's musical environment, "Everyone needs to become an entrepreneur, but there's no center in the country to help young musicians," Jessica says.

One goal of America's Arts Center is an "Artrepreneurship" division, a means to give independent musicians some background in business and promotion. In that regard, Jessica and others involved with "Bluebird Fly" plan to promote it nationally and use the experience as "lessons learned" for others who follow in her footsteps.

We'll keep an eye on how America's Arts Center develops through Jessica's business, financial and legal expertise. In the meantime, we'll be content to enjoy her talents as one fine singer.