



artist bio

NORAH JONES

Norah Jones first emerged on the world stage with the February 2002 release of *Come Away With Me*, her self-described “moody little record” that introduced a singular new voice and grew into a global phenomenon, sweeping the 2003 Grammy Awards and signaling a paradigm shift away from the prevailing pop music of the time. Since then, Norah has sold over 45 million albums worldwide and become a 9-time Grammy-winner. She has released a series of critically acclaimed and commercially successful solo albums—*Feels Like Home* (2004), *Not Too Late* (2007), *The Fall* (2009), and *Little Broken Hearts* (2012)—as well as albums with her collective bands The Little Willies and Puss N Boots. The 2010 compilation *...Featuring Norah Jones* showcased her incredible versatility by collecting her collaborations with artists as diverse as Willie Nelson, Outkast, Herbie Hancock, and Foo Fighters.

But when Norah first moved from Texas to New York City in the Summer of 1999 it was with the hope of being a jazz singer and pianist, and she quickly found gigs singing jazz standards in restaurants and clubs around town. Around the same time she met Jesse Harris (who would collaborate on her debut album and write her breakout song “Don’t Know Why”) and soon fell into the singer-songwriter scene at the Living Room on Manhattan’s Lower East Side. By the time she went into the studio to record *Come Away With Me* her sound had changed direction and evolved into something much broader and more her own. But her jazz influences—from Bill Evans and Miles Davis to Billie Holiday and Nina Simone—have always remained.

In 2014, Norah travelled to Washington DC to take part in the Kennedy Center’s historic “Blue Note at 75” concert celebrating the 75th anniversary of the legendary label that Norah has called home since the late Bruce Lundvall signed her in 2000. Surrounded by a family of Blue Note musicians including McCoy Tyner, Wayne Shorter, Dr. Lonnie Smith, Robert Glasper and others, Norah was inspired. After performing a gorgeous solo piano rendition of Hoagy Carmichael’s “The Nearness of You” she was joined by what she referred to on-stage as “one of the best bands I’ve ever played with” featuring Shorter on saxophone, Brian Blade on drums, John Patitucci on bass, and Jason Moran on piano for a stunning version of the Jesse Harris song “I’ve Got To See You Again” that appeared on *Come Away With Me*. That thrilling experience planted a seed...

Now Norah has come full circle with ***Day Breaks***, her remarkable sixth album which finds her returning to her jazz roots while also proving her to be this era’s quintessential American artist, the purveyor of an unmistakably unique sound that weaves together the threads of several bedrock styles of American music: country, folk, rock, soul, jazz. *Day Breaks* is a kindred spirit to *Come Away With Me*, though it is unquestionably the work of a mature artist who has lived life and grown immensely in her craft. The album features jazz luminaries including Shorter, Smith, and Blade, who played drums on Norah’s debut and became the backbone (and backbeat) of the new album.

“I just had so much fun that night at the Kennedy Center,” Norah remembers. “I heard so many great people play, it was a real sense of community. It was nice to reconnect with that side of my musical history. After that, I was just chilling at home, I had a new baby and I was up in the middle of the night, things would go through my head and I would try to record them while I was feeding the baby. I got into

playing more piano. We have a piano in our kitchen, so it became a late-night kitchen piano thing, and the songs I started writing over the next year were more piano based. And so this record just started coming together in my head.”

If there’s a single common thread that runs throughout *Day Breaks* it’s the piano. Norah’s unmistakable touch frames each of the album’s 12 tracks: nine originals written or co-written by Norah and her songwriting collaborators Sarah Oda and Pete Remm, as well as three choice covers of songs by Horace Silver, Duke Ellington and Neil Young.

“I definitely drifted away from the piano a little bit after that first record,” says Norah. “I still played it, but I was more inspired to write on guitar after that. So when I started writing all these songs on piano it was clear that I would play them on piano, they weren’t really guitar songs. I really loved playing piano on this record.”

As Norah was writing the album she found inspiration in a wide array of jazz influences. “I was listening to the kind of jazz records I love that I would have wanted to make like a Blossom Dearie record or a Shirley Horn record or Miles Davis ‘In A Silent Way,’ which is completely different! But those are elements of everything I wanted to do: John Coltrane ‘Lush Life,’ Charles Mingus ‘Haitian Fight Song,’ there were certain grooves and little things from each of those records that I was hearing. I was listening to a lot of organ trio stuff, soul jazz from the 60s, and listening to the Les McCann version of ‘Compared to What?’ a ton.”

Finally, Norah and her co-producer Eli Wolf began assembling the musicians for the recording, starting with Blade. “I’ve been a huge fan of Brian Blade’s since I was in high school and I saw him play with Joshua Redman. Brian really was central for me on this album, he’s such an incredible drummer. I wanted somebody who could bring different vibes and different styles and just do all of that naturally and I knew he could.” Norah also brought in Chris Thomas, the bass player in Blade’s Fellowship band. “What I wanted was a rhythm section that was locked in, I didn’t want to hire two people who had never played together before. I wanted to just kind of plug myself in and go. So those first sessions were three days, seven songs, and it was just Chris and Brian and me playing piano, and it was just great, very magical.”

The swinging “**It’s A Wonderful Time for Love**” resulted from those first sessions, remaining in its original trio version. The biting lyric was inspired by the dismal state of current world affairs and written in collaboration with Oda, a longtime friend. “Musically it was done, and I had the line ‘wonderful time for love’ but I didn’t know how to finish the lyrics without turning it into a love song or way too political. Sarah and I sat there and bounced ideas off each other until we honed in the lyrics, it was so fun.” The song “**Tragedy**” – with an easy-going vibe that belies its sad tale – was written in a similar fashion, with Norah providing the musical framework and lyrical hook while Oda fleshed out the words. “Sarah came in with the story, and I really love the way she put it together. Some of the lines she has are like poetry.”

The most rhythmically charged song on the album “**Flipside**” also has a powerful socio-political charge to it. Norah sets a driving bass line with her left hand and Smith’s organ swirls overhead while her vocal builds to a shout at the chorus. “I was really inspired by the news and the stuff that’s been going on in the world and in this country the last couple years,” she explains. “It’s been really volatile and crazy, and I was listening to that Les McCann song ‘Compared to What’ and very much influenced by how just grooving and amazing it is but it’s also very political and it’s just from the gut.”

While the guitar driven title track “**Day Breaks**” would have fit on Norah’s Danger Mouse produced album *Little Broken Hearts*, it’s “**Carry On**” that is perhaps the most reminiscent of *Come Away With Me*. “‘Carry On’ was one of those late-night kitchen piano songs that I wrote. The vibe is kind of like my first album. We did it pretty quick and it was mellow and pretty.”

Two songs on the album – “**Once I Had a Laugh**” and the Neil Young cover “**Don’t Be Denied**” – feature the rhythm team of drummer Karriem Riggins and bassist Vicente Archer as well as a horn section with trumpeter Dave Guy, trombonist J Walter Hawkes, and tenor saxophonist Leon Michels.

“I got to open for Neil Young with my girl band Puss N Boots last summer and it was so fun,” says Norah. “Don’t Be Denied” – from Young’s 1973 live album *Time Fades Away* – “is a song I’ve loved for a couple years, it’s a little more obscure. It was a hard song for me to relate to lyrically because it’s in first-person and about being a young male kid, so I switched the lyrics around a little, made it third-person, made it about a girl, and then I totally related to it.” To fill out the arrangement Norah also brought in her Puss N Boots bandmates Sasha Dobson and Catherine Popper for background vocals, as well as guitarist Tony Scherr, and Remm on organ.

The final sessions for *Day Breaks* were the first that Norah had envisioned for the album with the legendary Shorter and his longtime band members Blade and Patitucci. “I never would have imagined that I would be able to get Wayne Shorter to play on one of my albums,” Norah says, before adding “Not that it’s that far-fetched, he can do anything, he’s played on a lot of pop records. He happens to just be a beautiful musician and human who can make music in any good situation.”

With that band Norah decided to re-record “**Peace**,” a Horace Silver song she had written lyrics for and recorded a solo version of for an EP that preceded her debut album. “It just felt really right, lyrically it’s about peace, and right now it just made sense to do that song.” Featuring Shorter on soprano saxophone delivering a solo for the ages, the track sublimely encapsulates Blue Note’s past, present and future.

Norah admits she experienced a rare moment of nervousness playing with Shorter. “I felt comfortable even though in my head I was like ‘*What am I doing?!*’ I basically hired Wayne Shorter’s quartet but not Danilo Perez and I’m playing piano... ‘*What am I doing?!*,’” she laughs. “Wayne doesn’t really play unless he’s feeling it and I love that about him. I finished singing the verses and then all of a sudden he’s just there and it’s so beautiful, and I’m just playing under Wayne Shorter, he’s four feet away from me, and luckily I was just in the music and I wasn’t overthinking it and thank god I’ve been playing that song for 15 years so I know it really well!”

The album comes to a close with a stunning version of Duke Ellington’s “**Fleurette Africaine (African Flower)**” with Norah simply humming the melody and another soaring solo by Shorter. “I’m a huge Duke Ellington fan, of course, I love the way he played and his songs are so amazing. This song was just so cool and different and it had the vibe I wanted. It’s a really pretty meditation at the end of the record.”

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