

CHRISTINE JENSEN

Montreal-based saxophonist and composer Christine Jensen has been described as, “*an original voice on the international jazz scene... [and] one of Canada’s most compelling composers,*” by Mark Miller of the *Globe and Mail*. According to Greg Buium of *Downbeat Magazine*, “*Jensen writes in three dimensions, with a quiet kind of authority that makes the many elements cohere. Wayne Shorter, Maria Schneider and Kenny Wheeler come to mind.*” After a performance at the 2006 Montreal International Jazz Festival, Scott Yanow wrote, “*She’s rapidly developing into a major force ... as a player and as a writer.*”

Jensen is equally at home performing in small and large ensemble settings. Her latest opus, *Treelines-The Christine Jensen Jazz Orchestra* on Justin-Time Records, won her the 2011 Juno Award for Contemporary Jazz Album of the Year, along with Quebec’s Opus Award for jazz recording of the year. *Downbeat magazine* described it as “*...a stunning orchestral debut...****1/2 stars*”. She recently performed at various jazz festivals across Canada as well as at Dizzy’s Jazz Club-Lincoln Center in New York with this ensemble. “*Jensen’s formidable orchestra is the glistening sunlight, the tranquility and force of the ocean, and the majestic trees that her music imagines.*” -*Jazz Times*

Jensen has previously released three small ensemble recordings: *Collage* (2000), *A Shorter Distance* (2002), and *Look Left* (2006), all on the Effendi label. Along with her sister, New York-based trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, and close friend and long-time musical cohort, Swedish pianist, Maggi Olin, she co-leads the group, *Nordic Connect*. They released their first joint effort in 2007 entitled *Flurry* and followed up in 2010 with *Spirals*. The group has toured Canada, the US and Scandinavia extensively over the past five years.

In a review of *Nordic Connect* concert at the Rex in Toronto, J.D. Considine of the *Globe and Mail* described the quintet as: “*evoking the lean, cerebral drive of Miles Davis’s classic late-sixties quintet.*” He praised the “*dynamism and originality of the playing,*” and noted that in Christine’s performance style, “*ideas mattered more than dazzle.*”

Jensen took up roots, leaving Nanaimo for Montreal to get her first degree from McGill University in jazz performance in 1994. She followed this up by completing her Master’s in Jazz Performance in 2006. Christine has honed her skills as a saxophonist under the tutelage of an impressive list of leading musicians including Pat La Barbera, Kenny Werner, Jim McNeely, Remi Bolduc, Dick Oatts and Steve Wilson.

As an adjudicator, clinician, and instructor at McGill, she is influencing the next generation of composers and players. In her travels abroad, she has shared her love of music and invaluable experience with young jazz enthusiasts

around the world, from Norway to Peru, Turkey to Montreal, and back home on the West Coast. She has always been active in jazz education, leading clinics and workshops and adjudicating.

Over the years, she has collaborated with a diverse array of musicians, including Geoffrey Keezer, Lenny Pickett, Brad Turner, Karl Jannuska, François Théberge, Gary Versace, Donny McCaslin, Steve Amirault, Franck Amsallem, in addition to her long-term musical relationships with sister, Ingrid and partner, saxophonist-composer Joel Miller.

Composing has been a constant throughout her career — while she was still an undergrad at McGill, she contributed her compositions to her sister's debut album, *Vernal Fields* (Enja Records), which went on to win a Juno Award. This early recognition of her talent as a composer spurred her to keep writing. According to Jensen:

Composing seems to have chosen me, and it's become a passion to express myself. As a composer my progress has been steady, which probably differs from a lot of musicians of my generation who burst out as players first. I'm pretty lucky because composing has given me long-term growth, while improvising involves seizing the moment. Combining these two elements is the beauty of being a contemporary jazz artist.

Jensen performs and records regularly with her sister Ingrid — they have played together all over the world from Seattle's Jazz Alley to New York's Museum of Modern Art, from an SS Norway Jazz Cruise to a tour of Japan in 1997.

"There's definitely yin and yang in our approach. We come from different educational backgrounds in our later periods," she says. *"But we come from the same place, we grew up together, and there's a spiritual part of the playing that we're able to connect like no one else can."*

Noted for her ability to transfer the intimate sound of a quartet into larger ensembles, Jensen's music has been performed by ensembles around the globe, including the Frankfurt Radio Big Band, Germany; the UMO Big Band, Finland; and the McGill Jazz Orchestra, Montreal. She was honoured with an Opus Award for Jazz Concert of the Year in 2006, from the Quebec Council for the Arts, for leading the 18-member Christine Jensen Jazz Orchestra, with special guest Donny McCaslin.

In 2002, Jensen was awarded a six-month composition residency in Paris at the Québec Studio in the *Cité Internationale des Arts*, sponsored by the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec*. Upon her return to Canada, she toured extensively with her quartet, reworking the material that resulted in the recording, *Look Left*. The strong rapport among band members (pianist Dave Restivo, bassist Fraser Hollins, drummer Greg Ritchie, and frequent guest

guitarist Ken Bibace), combined with their shared musical influences, has allowed her music to continually evolve along with her voice as a composer through her original repertoire.

Christine Jensen was born in Sechelt, British Columbia, in 1970, growing up in Nanaimo among some of Canada's finest musicians, including Phil Dwyer, Diana Krall, blues guitarist, David Gogo, and her sister Ingrid. Her pianist/mother raised her daughters on music, exposing them to everything from Chopin to Broadway to Big Bands. Jensen's first love was the piano, developing an individual style influenced by two greats: "*I freaked out over Oscar Peterson and ... Bill Evans was a big epiphany when I was a teenager, as a musician who created an impressionistic sound.*" Once she started studying the saxophone at age 12, she quickly grew to love it as she realized that she could create her own voice through that instrument.

The past few years have kept Jensen busy on the international stage, taking her music to India, Peru, Argentina, Chile, Denmark, Mexico, Sweden, Turkey, and Haiti. In 2007, she performed with her quartet at Dizzy's Club at Lincoln Center, as well as at Burlington's "Discover Jazz" Festival. Jensen is frequently heard across the country live in concert on CBC radio and Radio-Canada's Espace-Musique.