

Mad

[MADELINE EASTMAN BIO]

Voted
**TALENT DESERVING
WIDER RECOGNITION
DOWNBEAT**
Critics Poll



TWICE Voted one of the
TOP FEMALE VOCALISTS
DOWNBEAT
Readers Poll

"People will take the ride with you if you set it up right. The audience really will take the ride with you. There's a way to break the ice. And then you can do anything. You can sing 'Freedom Jazz Dance' to 80-year-olds and they're cool."

That is **Madeline Eastman** talking about connecting with an audience so that she can do what she does. What she does is sing jazz. What that means is that she improvises, every time. It means that a song never sounds the same twice. It also means that she makes music with other musicians. She says, "I don't want a back-up trio. I don't want accompanists. I want to be part of the fun, to connect with everybody and take that wild ride."

There are many jazz-inflected and jazz-influenced singers, some of whom sell millions of records. But Eastman, according to a broad consensus in the jazz press, belongs to that select group of living singers who are actual jazz musicians. Don Heckman called her "a consummate, inventive, endlessly entertaining artist." Thomas Conrad said "she is one of the most technically accomplished and soulful vocalists in jazz." Christopher Loudon said "she's an inveterately unpredictable traveler who never fails to take us to magical places." Neil Tesser said that "her naturalistic and unsentimental style lends many of her songs an intriguing, ironic distance...wholly appropriate to the time in which we live."

One distinctive element of Eastman's art is her free concept of time. From her first album, *Point Of Departure* in 1990, she has been taking bright songs like "You Are My Sunshine" and

darkening and slowing them into devastating ambivalence. She often blows up jazz standards like Joe Henderson's "Inner Urge," burning over the changes, making up lyrics, or wailing wordless lyrics, finding a note that works throughout much of the harmony and riding the wave and then smashing down where it counts. Her relationship to the beat is always unpredictable, and as she slides across bar lines she transforms the meanings and the shapes of songs with spontaneous phrasing and creative displacements.

Another defining quality is one she was born with: her voice itself. It is not merely a "beautiful voice." It is a voice that rivets attention. It can mesmerize you with breathy caresses or it can slap you around, and she always uses it to tell human stories. She is a musician who works in melody and harmony and rhythm. But like all the best singers she is also an actor, believable in her chosen roles. She often finds those roles in unexpected places. On her new album, *Can You Hear Me Now?*, "Slow Boat To China" is as much dramatic recitation as musical performance. As she repeats "I'd like to get you on a slow boat to China, all to myself alone," the line takes on a disquieting quality of obsession.

She was born in San Francisco and grew up in a household with the radio tuned to KGO. The playlist included Barbra Streisand, Eydie Gorme, Vic Damone, Andy Williams, and Jack

Jones, singers who rarely ventured from the vocal pop music of the era. When Eastman was 18 and saw the movie *Lady Sings The Blues*, she heard her first great jazz standards, and they hit her like a revelation. She attended music classes at San Francisco State University and began showing up at Bay Area jam sessions in the mid-1970's. She says, "My generation had a different pool of listening experiences. I didn't grow up with big bands. By the time I started working as a singer, there were no longer traveling bands or two-week runs at clubs. So I didn't get to be a student in the same way that Ella and Sarah did. I heard the Great American Songbook on radio and TV. And of course there were records and going out to live gigs at every opportunity."

Eastman's career has taken her to virtually every important jazz club in the United States and many international destinations including Japan, Sweden, Germany, Finland, and Scotland. She has also become an in-demand clinician. She directs the vocal department at the *Stanford Jazz Workshop* and is the Artistic Director for *Jazzcamp West*. She is the vocal instructor for *Monterey Jazz Festival's Traveling Clinician Program*, and runs her own Vocal Retreats (*The VoiceShop*). But her first commitment has always been to performance. Twenty-one years ago she did something that is now extremely common but was so brave and unusual at the time it was widely remarked upon in the media: She started her own record label. In a partnership with another San Francisco singer, Kitty Margolis, she started *Mad-Kat Records*. Eastman says, "Kitty and I share a similar artistic vision and also agree about production values. We own our own work. We can do exactly what we want."

Since 1990, Eastman has released six albums on Mad-Kat. It is a compact body of work, but unique among contemporary singers for the consistency of its quality control-- musically, sonically, and even graphically. Eastman has worked with some of the finest recording engineers on the West Coast, and has invited some of the strongest players in jazz to take that "wild ride" with her. Phil Woods, Tom Harrell, Tony Williams, Cedar Walton,

Kenny Barron, Rufus Reid, and Matt Wilson have appeared on her albums. (Her reason for wanting Matt Wilson on her new album says something about how she chooses personnel. She says, "I wanted a crackin' drummer to kick some butt.") She has always made careful if unconventional decisions about repertoire. "Calling You (Theme from Baghdad Café)," from *Point Of Departure*, is an early example of a bold Eastman song choice that turned a lot of heads. She smoked it. She made it a liberating personal catharsis. It remains her best selling track on the internet. She was among the first North Americans to do Ivan Lins songs. She has set W.H. Auden verses to music and covered Charles Wright and the 103rd Street Rhythm Band.

While she has also been an innovative, counterintuitive interpreter of standards, her new release, *Can You Hear Me Now?*, is atypical in that it contains standards exclusively. Eastman rethinks songs like "You Say You Care" and "Show Me" and "Haunted Heart." It is also her first live album, recorded at the Bach Dancing And Dynamite Society in Half Moon Bay, California. Eastman acknowledges that "breaking the ice" with an audience was a skill she had to learn: "For the first ten years, I never opened my eyes when I sang. I couldn't get to first base with an audience. Mark Murphy was a great mentor for me and used to tell me to be brave. Mark always told me just to be myself, to open up, to give it out. Gradually I got comfortable talking to the audience. People expect verbal communication from a singer. It's part of a singer's job description." On the new album, on the spoken introduction to "Baubles, Bangles And Beads," you can hear her being herself. Her comments are natural, personal, truthful, and funny. She breaks the ice with the audience at the Bach Dancing And Dynamite Society, and they take the ride with her ●