

## Miki Purnell Full Bio by Scott Yanow

Singer Miki Purnell's debut recording, *Swingin' To The Sea*, made a strong impression upon lovers of jazz singing and the American popular song. Now with the release of her follow-up, *Midnight Bloom*, the very appealing vocalist builds upon her past success as she explores 14 songs having to do with experiencing the wonders of nature at night.

"I wanted to capture the beautiful elements in the garden when I spend evenings outside," says Miki. "The color of the sky changes from deep orange to purple gray, the moon rises, and the gentle wind brings cool cleansing air. The meditative evening awakens my sense of silence, stillness, and peace and I begin to notice subtle things like how night blooming flowers gaze at the moon and slowly unfold their petals. I feel that my life blooms in the midnight garden like flowers. These are the beauties that I was missing when I used to spend evenings under artificial light working with computers.





This album is about experiencing evening sunlight, sunsets, the breeze, and moonlight in a beautiful garden. And instead of having all of the songs on Midnight Bloom be overly relaxed lullabies, since a lot of other activity takes place at night, I included many different flavors around the topic."

Pianist-arranger Tamir Hendelman was a major part of Swingin' To The Sea and he is back for Midnight Bloom. "I performed a concert at Vitello's with Tamir's trio and I really liked how responsive they are and how the three of them interact with each other. I was inspired to invite his trio with drummer Dean Koba and bassist Alex Frank, adding guitarist Pat Kelley and Bob Sheppard on tenor, soprano and flute on some of the songs." In addition, percussionist Tommy Aros adds color and atmosphere to four of the selections ("No Moon At All," "Solitary Moon," "Happy Madness" and "Love Dance").

Miki Purnell's voice has grown in power and beauty during the past few years as is obvious throughout the memorable program. There are many highlights to the 14 moon and night songs which cover a wide variety of moods, tempos and subjects, whether it is the joyful swing song "Moonlight Savings Time," a seductive version of "No Moon at All," or the superior ballad singing (which is full of understated feeling) on "Quiet Now."



Her version of "Embraceable You" is particularly special for it includes Miki's vocalese lyrics to Lester Young's solo from a 1949 Carnegie Hall concert. "Midnight Madness Called Jazz," is based on Thelonious Monk's "'Round Midnight" but has a spicy new melody and, after a bit of the original song, Miki's words. The rarely-performed "Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams" (a hit for Bing Crosby in the 1930s) is inspired by Coleman Hawkins' 1945 recording with its lively variation on the melody. Other selections include "Happy Madness" (a particularly rewarding showcase for Miki's lovely voice), "Quiet Now," "The Night We Call It A Day," an upbeat "Teach Me Tonight," some fine scatting on "Love Dance," and haunting ballad renditions of "Solitary Moon," "You Are There," "Stars," and Miki's original "Midnight Bloom" which captures her alone in her flower garden at night.

Born and raised in Hiroshima, Japan, Miki Purnell had classical piano lessons for seven years and enjoyed singing when she was a child. In college she discovered jazz, starting with the Miles Davis/Bill Evans recording of "Blue In Green"





and then falling in love with the singing of Chet Baker ("I love how he can sing very sad and depressing songs in a beautiful way"), Ella Fitzgerald, Carmen McRae, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, Nancy Wilson, Julie London, Blossom Dearie and Anita O'Day.

Miki began to write songs of her own, won a song contest, and sang in a jazz club. However she soon became a doctor based in Hawaii and music was put on the backburner with a few exceptions. "As a medical provider, I did nursing home concerts with my attending doctor who played guitar. Singing with guitar and ukulele after a long day was fun."

After settling in San Diego where she worked as a family physician, she eventually had the desire to sing again. Miki took singing lessons with Kevyn Lettau and was persuaded by flutist Lori Bell to record a CD. Her debut, *Swingin' To The Sea*, has arrangements by pianist Tamir Hendelman and Ms. Bell and fresh interpretations of such standards as "Bluesette," "Estate," "Maiden Voyage," "The Nearness Of You," "The Island," "Swinging On A Star," "On Green Dolphin Street" and "A Night In Tunisia." In addition, Miki revived Alec Wilder's "Moon & Sand," introduced her originals "Sexy Sexy" and "Sunny San Diego Sunday," and sounds very appealing on Dave MacKay's "Free" and "Like Me." *Swingin' To The Sea* received very favorable reviews in Europe, Japan, the Caribbean and the U.S.





Since that time, Miki Purnell has progressed in her medical career, joining the second largest integrative medicine team in the United States and relocating to the Sacramento area. She has also evolved in her music with her performances on Midnight Bloom showing a great deal of growth. As with her first release, every note that Miki sings is not only perfectly in tune (she has perfect pitch) but is full of warmth, beauty, and an infectious enthusiasm. "I've stopped being excessively self-critical and now have a compassion-driven approach focusing on the favorable qualities and uniqueness of my voice as an instrument, picking out songs more intuitively that sound good when I sing them. I always work on touching people through medicine and music. Being involved in music cultivates my creativity in medicine and in bonding with patients."

Summing up the idea behind Midnight Bloom, Miki says, "I want to invite listeners to a midnight garden where beautiful darkness, silence, and stillness harmonize with night blooming flowers. I want to guide my listeners to a journey of multidimensional feelings, from dusky dawn to midnight in my garden where different colors of emotions from gentle and ethereal to a dangerously seductive bloom like flowers. Being in harmony with our own garden and our environment makes us feel more grounded, happier and peaceful."



Miki Purnell plans to perform more often in the future since her new job gives her more flexibility with her time. She is also working on her piano playing so she can accompany herself, and is currently planning her third album. Enthusiastic about the future, she says, "Singing is about communicating from one's heart and touching the hearts of others. I believe that music is the melody of our soul. It cleanses our mind and helps us to see the beauty of life. I hope to continue using it to uplift others."

Scott Yanow, jazz journalist/historian and author of 11 books including *The Jazz Singers* and *Jazz On Record 1917-76*

