

MINDI ABAIR BIO

In a career that spans eight solo albums and countless collaborations in the studio and live on stage, Mindi Abair has made her mark as one of the most recognizable saxophonists in the US. You may know her as the saxophonist on American Idol, or the only saxophonist to tour with rock legends Aerosmith since 1973. You may have seen her on stage with Bruce Springsteen for a historic night at the Beacon Theater, or tuned in as she joined Paul Shaffer and the CBS Orchestra on the Late Show with David Letterman, sat in with The Roots on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, caught her recent appearances at The Grand Ole Opry, or recognized her as Al Pacino's saxophonist in the movie Danny Collins.

For her newest musical pursuit, she plunges headlong into vintage rock, blues and soul territory, harkening back to the days when saxophone was as integral an instrument as the guitar in the early days of rock and soul with her newest recording, Mindi Abair And The Boneshakers LIVE In Seattle.

In addition to the years of hard work and dedication leading up to these successes, some of the credit is due to an impressive pedigree. Abair's paternal grandmother was an opera singer, and her father was a saxophonist and B3 player in a band called The Entertainers – a gig that kept the whole family on the road for several years of Mindi's childhood. By the time the band broke up and the Abairs put down roots in St. Petersburg, Florida, five-year-old Mindi had already demonstrated musical aspirations of her own by taking up the piano.

She picked up the saxophone in the fourth grade and took part in every band program available in elementary, middle and high school. After a year at the University of North Florida, she transferred to Berklee College of Music, where she graduated magna cum laude with a degree in woodwind performance.

Abair recalls some wise counseling she received during her college years: "My saxophone teacher Joe Viola told me every week, 'You have to start your own band. You've got your own sound. Don't practice a bunch of David Sanborn or Wayne Shorter licks. Go out and make your own mark.' It was the best advice anyone could have given me."

She took the advice and ran with it, all the way to the opposite coast. She landed in Los Angeles, where she began a long dues-paying process that included touring gigs with Teena Marie, Adam Sandler, Bobby Lyle and Jonathan Butler. When she was home from the road, she booked her own band in just about any club that would have them. And on those occasions when none would, she played on the streets of Santa Monica. "I didn't want to wait tables when I had a music degree from the foremost contemporary music school in the world. I came here to do what I do," she says. "I'd take my horn down to 3rd Street Promenade and just play. I paid my rent for quite a few months by doing that."

Abair's eight solo CDs have garnered ten #1 radio hits, seven top 5 spots and two #1 spots on the Billboard Contemporary Jazz album chart.

Abair released her first album, the independently-produced Always and Never the Same, in 1999, while touring with the Backstreet Boys. By the beginning of the new decade, the combination of nonstop performing and her well-received indie release had helped solidify her musical identity. "By the time I signed on with Verve in 2002," she says, "I felt like I knew who I was as an artist. I knew what I wanted to say, and every artist I'd toured with on the way here helped me shape who I was."

It Just Happens That Way, Abair's major label debut in 2003, was the first in a string of chart-topping solo recordings on Verve that also included I Can't Wait for Christmas (2004), Come As You Are (2005) and Life Less Ordinary (2007). She made the move to Concord Music Group, with the 2008 release of Stars, an album that showcased – more than any of her previous recordings – her vocal work as an engaging counterpoint to her solid saxophone chops. In Hi-Fi Stereo, released in 2010, paid tribute to the sounds of the '60s and early '70s harkening back to artists such as King Curtis and Junior Walker, icons that influenced Mindi from a young age.

Her two seasons on American Idol in 2011 and 2012 led to her joining Aerosmith as their first saxophonist since 1973 for their 2012 Summer Global Warming Tour. And Clarence Clemons untimely death led to her touring with Max Weinberg and a night at the Beacon Theater with Bruce Springsteen.

"I got off those tours and I had this burst of electric energy to make some music of my own," says Abair. "Those tours really affected what I was feeling and what I was writing. I had spent so many nights on stage with these guys who were sweating and bleeding and giving it all for their audience. I wanted that strength and that abandon on my record, and I was inspired to make that happen."

As Wild Heart was starting to take shape, Abair joined a group called Summer Horns with fellow saxophonists Dave Koz, Richard Elliot and Gerald Albright. The resulting sax foursome crafted a record that paid tribute to the great horn bands of the late '60s and early '70s. The Summer Horns recording scored a GRAMMY® nomination for Best Pop Instrumental CD.

She received a 2015 GRAMMY® nomination for Best Contemporary Instrumental Album for her solo cd Wild Heart featuring friends Gregg Allman, Joe Perry, Trombone Shorty, Booker T. Jones, Keb' Mo', and Max Weinberg.

And if writing, recording and touring weren't enough, Abair authored the book "How To Play Madison Square Garden – A Guide To Stage Performance." She also began a two-year term in 2013 as President of the Los Angeles Chapter of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) and presently serves as a National Trustee. "It's been a very eye-opening and inspiring role," she says. "What an honor to serve as a leader in the most preeminent organization of the music business. This is a group of people who give back constantly to inspire and strengthen the next generation of music makers, and they remind me daily what beautiful power we hold as creators of music."

The artists she's toured with and/or recorded with are a testament to her talent: Aerosmith, Gregg Allman, Keb' Mo', Joe Perry, Bobby Rush, Lalah Hathaway, Duran Duran, Adam Sandler, Lee Ritenour, The Backstreet Boys, Booker T. Jones, Jimmy Webb, Mandy Moore, Max Weinberg, Bill Champlin, David Pack, Mocean Worker, The Ides of March, Rick Braun, Teena Marie, Bobby Lyle, Jonathan Butler, and Peter White.

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