

LIZZ WRIGHT

Biography

Lizz Wright has been charming music fans worldwide ever since she appeared on the late pianist and composer Joe Sample's 2002 disc, *The Pecan Tree* (Verve). The following year, she gained even wider recognition for her critically acclaimed debut record, *Salt* (Verve). Produced by the legendary Tommy LiPuma – best known for his award-winning work with George Benson, Diana Krall, and Natalie Cole – the album helped introduce one of the most captivating female vocalists of her generation as it raced to number two on *Billboard's* "Top Contemporary Jazz" chart.

Wright was born in the small town of Hahira, Georgia. A preacher's kid, she sang during most services, and it is there, deep in the joy of ministry, that one can find the roots of the voice and spirit that so captivates listeners. With peculiar focus, she seamlessly weaves through the genres of gospel, jazz, folk, pop, and blues, handling them like colors on a palette. Ultimately, it is the voice, the stories told and the call to connect that transcend categorization and stir her audiences.

Wright's next two records, *Dreaming Wide Awake* (Verve, 2005) and *The Orchard* (2008), saw her continue to grow artistically, as she delved deeper into songwriting. For these records, she teamed with noted producer Craig Street, who in turn recruited a cadre of eclectic songwriters - Toshi Reagon, Jesse Harris, John Leventhal - to co-write original songs; she also explored and reinterpreted the exciting repertoire of Chocolate Genius, Joe Henry, and Neil Young, among others. The tune "Hit The Ground," was an indication of Wright's evolution as a storyteller, and it helped propel *Dreaming Wide Awake* to number one on *Billboard's* "Top Contemporary Jazz" chart.

Wright's 2010 disc, *Fellowship* (Verve), found her drawing deeply from the wellspring of her years singing in church. She delivered poignant readings of gospel classics such as "God Specializes," "Sweeping Through the City," and "Amazing Grace." Still, Wright didn't stick too rigidly to traditional gospel material, her broad perspective and a desire to tell her story allowed her to find the spiritual in comparatively secular material like Gerry Goffin and Barry Goldberg's "(I've Got to Use My) Imagination" – a big hit for Gladys Knight and the Pips – Jimi Hendrix's "In From the Storm," and Meshell Ndegeocello and Bob Marley's "Fellowship."

In the years after *Fellowship*, Wright continued to tour extensively, and branched out musically with her studies of hand percussion, adding it into the live set to the rapturous approval of her fans. She sang "Nobody's Fault But Mine," on Meshell Ndegeocello's fascinating 2012 disc, *Pour Une Âme Souveraine: A Dedication to Nina Simone*. She also made several outstanding appearances with GRAMMY Award-winning drummer and bandleader, Terri Lyne Carrington, who features Wright on her 2015 Concord Records disc, *Mosaic Project: LOVE and SOUL*.

“That called me to sing and improvise in new ways, which was really fun,” Wright says about her work with Carrington. Already a passionate cook and graduate from the Natural Gourmet Institute in NY, Wright broadened her horizons further by working on production teams for various festivals and events in her adopted state of North Carolina.

After releasing four acclaimed records for Verve, Wright moved to Concord Records to release her fifth disc, *Freedom & Surrender*. She recruited GRAMMY Award-winning producer, bassist and songwriter Larry Klein. The record features rich contributions from longtime collaborators Reagon and Harris, and new partnerships with David Batteau, J.D. Souther, and Maia Sharp, yielding captivating originals such as “Lean In,” “Real Life Painting” and “Right Where You Are,” featuring Gregory Porter. Equally admired as an interpreter of songs, Wright also turns her eyes towards Nick Drake’s “River Man,” the Bee Gees’ “To Love Somebody” and bonus track Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger’s “The First Time I Ever Saw Your Face.”

The impressionable journey of making records and touring to support them ensures that no artist is the same for their fifth record as they were for their first. Wright’s soaring arc of growth and expanding expression has been the public weaving of an intricate and colorful tapestry. For her fifth project, supported by the brilliance, wisdom, and friendship of Klein, Wright’s own fulfillment and enjoyment from the process are evident. She is gifted with an extraordinary instrument, and *Freedom & Surrender* allows Wright to illuminate her dynamic soul through the layers of passion and playfulness found within the songs.

Bio by John Murph and Nicholas D’Amato