

Monique diMattina long bio: Feb 2021

MONIQUE DIMATTINA

Acclaimed Australian pianist/composer and singer/songwriter Monique diMattina has recorded and performed extensively since the early 2000's, working in various genres and settings.

Monique has released three solo piano albums in filmic and neo-classical styles, and three jazz/pop albums as singer/songwriter, including the critically acclaimed 'Nola's Ark', recorded in New Orleans with producer Mark Bingham (R.E.M. Cassandra Wilson), Leroy Jones, Matt Perrine and June Yamagishi. Monique has composed music for various film and stage projects, and is known for her ABC and Triple R radio segment '*Shaken Not Rehearsed*', in which she wrote and performed songs within an hour, to listener requests.

In her energetic live performances Monique's larrikin lyrics are at the fore, supported by her authoritative and soulful pianism. A raconteur "*about us and the place we live*" (The Age), possessing a "*Dylanesque swagger with the Aussie vernacular*" (Jazz&Beyond.com), Monique has toured her shows **The Dao of Dylan** and **An Affair to Dismember** to critical acclaim.

Monique is constantly writing and recording, citing musical inspirations as J.S. Bach, C.P.E. Bach, Nina Simone, Sidney Bechet, Edith Piaf, Bob Dylan, Astor Piazzola, Toots Thielemans, Ricki Lee Jones, Lili Boulanger, Donny Hathaway, George Gershwin and Allen Toussaint.

Her latest release TIDES for solo piano comprises ten piano miniatures, composed and recorded during the 2020 Melbourne lockdown.

A Fulbright Scholar, Honorary Fellow of the University of Melbourne and PhD Candidate at the University of Tasmania, Monique teaches in the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and Monash University Jazz departments, and is in demand as an artist-in-residence and clinician.

Beginnings

Of mixed convict and Italian heritage, diMattina is one of five siblings who all played musical instruments. When diMattina's maternal grandmother gifted the household with a piano, young Monique became hooked.

Through high school Monique exploited the fact that extra music lessons allowed her to miss science and geography. She played classical piano repertoire, clarinet, saxophone, celtic harp, electric bass, guitar and orchestral percussion. In her mid teens Monique was lucky to take lessons from Australian Jazz legend Bob Sedergreen. Bob's method combined basic jazz theory, jamming and astrology – a winning combination.

Originally studying law, Monique deferred that course to take what she thought would be a gap year for enjoying musical hobbies. That decision has now seen her live in four continents, play for heads of state, work with the likes of Lou Reed and Bjork, and develop an addiction to Gus's pickles while living in NYC.

In 2000 diMattina received Fulbright and Queens Trust awards to study music in NYC. While in NYC on and off over ten years, Monique wrote her Masters' thesis on jazz pianist Wynton Kelly, waited tables at the Village Vanguard Jazz Club, studied with Sophia Rosoff, Fred Hersch, Sam Yahel and Barry Harris, played regularly at singer/songwriter haunts The Living Room, Rockwood Music Hall and Joe's Pub, performed recitals for dignitaries including Kofi Annan, Bill Clinton and Vaclav Havel, worked for Bjork, opened for Lou Reed, taught at the Henry Street Music School and ran the New York marathon.

After witnessing the 9/11 attacks in NYC Monique wrote a series of solo piano works that were to become her first solo piano release - **Senses**.

At this time Monique also recorded her first album **Live at the 55** at the iconic 55 Bar in Greenwich Village - an instrumental collection of covers and originals in a blues/roots vein.

In between periods in NYC, diMattina travelled extensively, spending time in Europe, Japan, China and Sydney as principal pianist for The Lion King Orchestra.

diMattina's first child was born in Harlem NY in 2008, just in time to participate in wild Obama victory celebrations. The following year Monique returned to live in Melbourne, where her second daughter was born in 2012. Between 2009 and 2016 Monique released five albums on the Head Records label.

Monique diMattina now lives in Fitzroy, Melbourne with her two children. She was recently Musical Director of '**Tapestry: The Songs of Carol King**' with Vika Bull and Debra Byrne. In addition to presenting her own shows, Monique performs in duo with Rebecca Barnard, with Harry James Angus (The Cat Empire), Alma Zygiel and Clare Bowditch.

Monique diMattina is a Yamaha artist.

DISCOGRAPHY

TIDES

Written during Melbourne's four month lockdown in 2020, Monique's February 2021 solo piano release comprises ten filmic, neo-classical solo piano compositions. Breaking fresh ground for diMattina, usually an improviser, the pieces are all notated and available in sheet music form. Monique had prepared to record the album on her home piano when restrictions lifted, so she was able to record the album in one night, on the Yamaha C7X at the Australian Piano Warehouse.

Lachlan Carrick recorded, mixed and mastered the album, and there are film clips for each of the ten tracks melding live performance and nature based footage, by video artist Jemma Donovan.

SENSES

Monique was living in NYC in 2001 during the 9/11 attacks, and the material she composed in the following months was heavily influenced by these events. In this period Monique was living out of suitcases and between countries, and it took some time for the material to be recorded, compiled and finally released as '**Senses**' for solo piano, upon her return to Australia in 2009. *'Timeless piano dreams and improvisations – the thinking person's zen escape.'*

The Village Voice, NYC.

WELCOME STRANGER

In 2010 diMattina released **Welcome Stranger** on Head Records, the first album in which she sings and plays piano. This album comprises mostly original songs, with one cover of Paul Kelly's '*Dumb Things*', in a New Orleans style. Monique has said the album title refers to a famed gold nugget from Victorian goldrush days, as well as the experience of returning as a stranger to one's hometown after years away. The album was reviewed as '*about us and from the place we live*' by The Age Melbourne music journalist Chris Johnston, while the song '*Livingest Place*' was dubbed "*the nicest slyest Melbourne vs Sydney song ever*" by **Doug Spenser ABC RN**.

diMattina's musical collaborators in **Welcome Stranger** include Doug de Vries, Sam Lemann, Ben Robertson, Steve Grant and Andrew Swann on drums/guitars.

Humour and pathos gloriously entwine songs such as the blues-hip '*Livingest Place*' ("*the weather man tries but he really doesn't know*") and sardonic '*Joan of Burwood*' ("*all she ever does is burn the steak...*").

Stylistically **Welcome Stranger's** catchy grooves draw from lyrical country blues and New Orleans roots.

"She sings New Orleans stompers as confidently as she sings supple, tiny lullabies; this is an album with room for both and more. It feels as though it's about us and from the place we live."... Chris Johnston, The Age

"diMattina's feel-good album is upbeat and bluesy, her seductive skills on keys and Steve Grant's trumpet solos reach new heights. From French bohemian to dedicated blues to sweet lullabies, 'Welcome Stranger' is bound to win you over one way or another." Tiffany Bridger, Rave Magazine

"A touch, tone and sensibility only found in artists of the highest calibre" Dr Tony Gould AM

SUN SIGNS

In 2011 diMattina followed **Senses** with a second solo piano album - **Sun Signs** - designed around the twelve signs of the zodiac. **Sun Signs** presents Monique diMattina as composer/contemplative - "*cherishing each note she plays and the spaces between them.*" (Doug Spenser, ABC RN).

"Atmospheric, thoughtful. Calm notes with a sharp intelligence."
Sue Roberts, BBC Radio 4

NOLA'S ARK

In 2012 Monique diMattina's fifth album **Nola's Ark** was recorded in New Orleans. **Nola's Ark** draws on experiences of motherhood, and brings together echoes of Ramsey Lewis, Dr John, Nina Simone, and Blossom Dearie.

The famed downtown Piety Studios (Elvis Costello, John Scofield, Allen Toussaint) became the vessel for this tribute to jazz roots, with an all-star crew including trumpeter Leroy Jones on trumpet (Harry Connick Jr Band) Matt Perrine on bass/sousaphone (Dr John, Jon Cleary) and June Yamagishi (Treme series) on guitar - steered by producer Mark Bingham (R.E.M., John Scofield, Cassandra Wilson).

Many of the eight original songs on this album were written on diMattina's popular 3RRR and ABC Melbourne segment where she wrote and performed original songs, within an hour-long radio show, live-to-air to listener requests.

"Inside, the tones and the groove are as laid-back as they are honey quilted. Afternoon music for the satisfied at heart - or those who need to be. Give it some time and gently slide into the breezy journey captured by Mark Bingham (R.E.M.) at downtown New Orleans' Piety Studios. Here, jazz pianist-vocalist di Mattina and collected musicians are in their element, and place you in yours." Arne Sjostedt, Sydney Morning Herald

EVERYBODY LOVES SOMEBODY

In 2016 Monique diMattina's fifth album **Everybody Loves Somebody** came off the back of her sell-out show '**An Affair to Dismember**' - a rich collection of songs on fast lust, platonic pacts, French fantasy, star-crossed train wrecks, parasitic attachments and more.

Ironically the album opens with the Dylan song diMattina herself walked down the aisle to at the age of twenty-one...re-harmonized in unexpected ways, rather like the life journey of the songstress herself.

Monique penned six of the eleven songs on **'Everybody Loves Somebody'**, her signature versatility seeing her glide from piano fantasias to vocals, rhodes/organ/melodion and ukulele, dancing in the cracks between jazz/blues/roots, country and pop. Producer/engineer Marty Brown (Clare Bowditch, Art of Fighting) sculpts an intimate soundscape, from diMattina's home piano to his Coburg studio, with the cream of Melbourne's jazz/roots scene, including James Sherlock (guitar), Howard Cairns (bass), Eamon McNelis (trumpet) and tenor sax giant Paul Williamson.

The result is a stunning musical exposition that raises more questions than it answers. diMattina says "We are poking a stick at various notions of 'love' and devotion..."

"With a vast musical education and experience behind her, Monique diMattina has reached that hallowed ground where influences and inspirations coalesce to produce a unique voice. On this new album, jazz sensibilities and classic song writing skills blend to produce something reminiscent of the jazzier shadows of Rickie Lee Jones or Joni Mitchell. That is to say, some of the approaches, and aesthetics draw from jazz, but first and foremost it's about the singer and her songs"

Martin Jones Rhythm Magazine

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