

# JEAN RAMIREZ

vocalist

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**Jean Ramirez** is a San Francisco-based vocalist and songwriter. Her musical passions range from jazz and standards, to bossa nova, to world music and beyond. Jean's love for music and performing comes from a simple idea: "It's inspiring," she says. "You can explore different emotional landscapes, and take the audience to places they don't usually go."

Those landscapes can be clearly felt on the set of demo recordings she produced in 2015. Featuring a sensitive backup team of pianist Jonathan Alford and bassist Dan Feiszli, the five tracks range from the bouncing swing of Bob Dorough's "Devil May Care," to Judy Niemack's inventive vocalese treatment of the Bill Evans tune "Interplay," to a Mozart-meets-jazz rendition of the classic waltz "How My Heart Sings."

But her ability to take listeners on an emotional journey really comes to the fore on the set's two ballads, Bill Cantos' "I Feel You" and pianist Fred Hersch's achingly beautiful "Songs & Lullabies," with lyrics by Norma Winstone. Though influenced by her favorite artists—among them icons like Ella Fitzgerald, Anita O'Day, Billie Holiday, and Sarah Vaughan, as well as unique talents including Winstone, Fay Victor, Jay Clayton, and Anita Wardell—Jean has clearly crafted a sensitive and vivacious style all her own.

Although she has always loved singing, her journey to becoming a performing vocalist wasn't a straight line. Born in the Philippines, Jean followed her parents to the United States at the age of 13. She was inspired by pop vocalists from Karen Carpenter to Madonna (as well as New Wave groups like New Order and Depeche Mode), and enjoyed singing with her high school glee club, but didn't consider the possibility of pursuing music seriously. "I just didn't come from an environment where that was something you did," she says.

But that changed after a reunion with an old friend who told Jean of her excitement about her own voice lessons, and she was inspired to take a chance





at rekindling her own musical potential. She began studying privately with singer-songwriter Sue Govali in 2007, and by the following year she had begun a three-year stint with the 30-woman San Francisco-based vocal ensemble Conspiracy of Venus, performing an eclectic mix of pop, jazz, rock, and other genres.

By 2011, she had begun to focus on jazz, continuing her studies with esteemed vocalist and educator Faith Winthrop (developing a fruitful relationship which later led to Jean's group opening for Winthrop at a performance at the Emerald Tablet in North Beach in 2014). She was soon testing her chops as a solo vocalist, regularly participating in the jazz workshops of longtime Bay Area vocal guru Jesse Foster at Rasselas, culminating in a performance at Foster's "Jazz in the Basement" salon series.

Seeking to challenge herself further, she expanded her studies to the Jazzschool (now California Jazz Conservatory) in Berkeley, digging deeper into vocal technique and repertoire in classes and workshops with accomplished musicians including Ken Helman, Laurie Antonioli, Theo Bleckmann, Sandy Cressman, Andrea Wolper, and the late jazz legend Mark Murphy.

On making the leap into jazz improvisation, Jean says, "I improvise so much in my daily life, so I knew I could do it... but I had to find the right teacher to unlock my belief system about improvising in public." That search led her to vocalist and educator Molly Holm, with whom she has studied since 2014.

Since diving into the performing world, Jean has shared her talents with audiences at a wide variety of venues throughout the region, from San Francisco (including Mr. Tipple's Recording Studio, the Revolution Cafe, Simple Pleasures Cafe, Black Horse Tavern, and a six-month run at the jazz bistro Cafe Claude), to the North Bay (Mountain View Winery in San Rafael), to the East Bay (Caffe Trieste), to the peninsula (Angelica's Restaurant in Redwood City) and beyond. Her list of instrumental collaborators reads like a who's-who of local talent, including pianists Ben Stolorow, Grant Levin, Keith Saunders, Greg Jacobs, and Larry Chinn, guitarists Jack Riordan and Luke Westbrook, bassists Adam Gay and Justin Carney, and drummer Mark Lee.

"When I was younger, I worked hard to sound like the great singers I loved," Jean says, reflecting on her musical journey, "but as I've grown as a musician, I've found my own voice." Now, she says, "the biggest compliment someone can give me is, 'you sound like you.'"