

MILES DAVIS

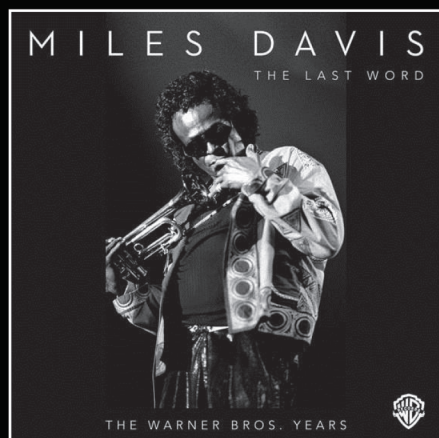
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Pianist Roberta Piket's new album is a tribute to Marian McPartland.



Piket Pays Tribute to McPartland

THE FIRST TIME ROBERTA PIKET WAS A guest on the NPR program *Piano Jazz*, she was nervous about meeting its famous host, Marian McPartland.

Piket had crossed paths with the icon before—but in an entirely different context. Back in 1993, Piket was a contestant in the Thelonious Monk Composers Competition. "Marian was a judge that year, and she heard me perform," Piket said. "Then, in 1994, out of the blue, she called me and said, [*imitating McPartland's English accent*] 'Hello, this is Marian McPartland; I'd like you to appear on *Piano Jazz*.'"

"I was pretty excited to meet her, and a little intimidated. I went to the studio and put out my hand to greet her and said, 'Hi, Marian, I'm Roberta.' And the first thing she said to me was, 'The god-damn piano tuner isn't here yet!' It put me right at ease," Piket laughed. "I knew that she was one of us—just another jazz musician."

McPartland, an NEA Jazz Master and winner of a DownBeat Lifetime Achievement Award, died in 2013 at age 95 after twin careers as a pianist and a popular national radio personality. She hosted *Piano Jazz* for more than 30 years. After Piket's appearance, McPartland befriended and became a mentor to the younger pianist, inviting her to appear on the program three times and offering career advice and moral support over the years.

"For me as a female musician, to feel that validation was very encouraging," Piket recalled, "especially at a time, the early '90s, when the image of a jazz musician was a young man in a zoot suit."

Piket is saluting her mentor with *One For Marian: Celebrating Marian McPartland* (Thirteenth Note), a revelatory new album that emphasizes McPartland the composer. Since 1996, Piket has recorded 11 albums as a leader, often with a trio. More recently, she released

two albums of her subtle, fascinating piano solos. For the McPartland tribute, however, she assembled a highly accomplished sextet of leaders: Steve Wilson on alto saxophone and flute, Virginia Mayhew on tenor sax and clarinet, Bill Mobley on trumpet, Harvie S on bass and Billy Mintz on drums. Piket arranged the six McPartland compositions on the album, adding two of her own that are dedicated to the British-born pianist. The sextet format allowed Piket to tease out McPartland's sophisticated and often gorgeous harmonies, while also leaving room for a full palette of powerful soloists.

"I think Marian's songs have been overlooked. For some reason, her songs never made it into *The Real Book*, for example, which is how many younger musicians would learn them," Piket said. "I know that Marian felt they were under-recorded. It mattered to her—she really wanted to be more recognized as a composer. She wrote these beautiful tunes, and she should be recognized for them."

One of the most famous McPartland tunes is the enchanting ballad "Twilight World," with an evocative lyric by Johnny Mercer. Piket's producer, Todd Barkan, suggested they reach out to acclaimed vocalist Karrin Allyson, who had once sung the tune at an all-star 85th birthday tribute to McPartland. Allyson readily agreed, and the haunting duet marks her first collaboration with Piket.

One For Marian includes some of McPartland's best songs, including "Ambiance," "Threnody," "In The Days Of Our Love" and, of course, "Kaleidoscope," the familiar theme from *Piano Jazz*.

"It's interesting to compare Marian's versions of these tunes with ours," Piket said. "I didn't want to just re-create what Marian had done. I treated them like the great compositions they are—strong enough to withstand a different interpretation."

—Allen Morrison