

# Channeling Marian

**Pianist Roberta Piket has peppered her 10 previous albums with close to 40 of her own compositions. But her latest boasts only one:** the title track to *One for Marian* (Thirteenth Note Records), Piket's tribute to her friend and champion, Marian McPartland.

In 1993, Piket placed second in the Thelonious Monk BMI Composers Competition; that's where McPartland first heard her and extended an invitation to appear on the long-running NPR program *Piano Jazz*. Piket recalls, "She played 'Twilight World' on the show, and I said, 'That's a great tune; I didn't know it was yours.' And then she said, 'I'm glad you're actually hearing it; I figure my tunes are the world's most obscure tunes.' She was a little disappointed that more musicians hadn't recorded her compositions" (which include the elegant "Ambiance" and the tricky theme to *Piano Jazz*, entitled "Kaleidoscope"). So when Piket recorded her first album, *Unbroken Line*, a couple years later, she made a point of playing one McPartland tune, adding more to her repertoire over the years. "She was always very appreciative when I told her I was recording another of her tunes," Piket says.

Still, the concept of devoting an entire disc to McPartland's work didn't take shape until shortly after her death in 2011. A booking at the 2012 Wall Street Jazz Festival — with the proviso that Piket bring a larger band than her usual trio — spurred her decision to arrange McPartland's music for the sextet that would eventually record *One for Marian*. The album stars saxophonists Steve Wilson and Virginia Mayhew — with a guest shot by Karrin Allyson, singing Johnny Mercer's lyrics on the silky "Twilight World" — and it represents a fitting change of pace for Piket, who had spent the last several years focused on her own fluid, fluent technique.

"My priority before this record had been to develop my solo playing, and a lot of that came out of being on Marian's show in 2011. I felt dissatisfied [with my performance] and as a result did two solo piano records. So I was ready for a bigger project, and the sextet is big enough to include more



colors — but small enough to maintain intimacy." That balance enhances the cheery up-tempo title track. "I didn't want some mournful dirge," Piket says. "I wanted a happy song to celebrate her, and the fact that she never stopped

growing and never stopped learning from the musicians around her. I had her spirit in mind, her attitude and her approach, and I just tried to channel that."

—Neil Tesser