

**BIO**

# Ellen Robinson

In an art form awash with ingenues and shiny singers newly minted from music school, Ellen Robinson's emergence is a breath of fresh air. With her new album **Don't Wait Too Long**, the Oakland jazz vocalist makes a convincing case for the value of life experience as a template for reimagining American Songbook standards and more contemporary fare. Displaying impressive

skills as a songwriter, she also infuses hard-won wisdom in original tunes. Like her two previous releases, **Don't Wait Too Long** was produced by the sure hand of drummer and veteran DJ Bud Spangler. It's the work of a late-blooming artist with a clear, heartfelt vision, exquisite taste, and lovely voice that lingers in your ear long after the music has finished.

Recorded live at Freight & Salvage, the album captures the vivacious singer with her highly sympathetic band featuring the articulate bassist Sam Bevan, versatile drummer Dan Foltz, the unabashedly lyrical saxophonist Kristen Strom, and pianist Murray Low, one of the region's most sought after accompanists. Focusing on ballads with sinuous melodies, Robinson sustains a dreamy mood with a deceptively unadorned style, eschewing vocal acrobatics and scat solos in favor of close attention to melodies and emotionally insightful phrasing. Exploring a program laden with unexpected treasures, she distills the essence of each song. *"I have to feel connected to the lyrics,"* says Robinson. *"I'm not a gymnastic singer in terms of scatting. I do like taking a straight ahead jazz tune or a pop tune and making it my own."*

The album opens with "Dance Only With Me," a rarely sung gem by Jule Styne, Betty Comden and Adolph Greene from the 1958 Broadway comedy "Say, Darling" about the making of a Broadway musical. She turns the song into a wistful reverie, far more a whispered prayer than an imperious demand. Even when Robinson interprets familiar material, like Lerner and Loew's standard "Almost Like Being in Love," or Johnny Burke and Jimmy Van Heusen's "But Beautiful," she unveils new shades of meaning in the lyrics, letting the tunes unfold at deliciously languorous tempos.

When Robinson takes liberties with a song, like her slyly re-harmonized version of Irving Berlin's "Be Careful It's My Heart," she doesn't so much reinvent it as highlight the tune's playfully imploring lyric. She transforms songs of more recent vintage too, like her jazz appropriation of the mid-60s pop hit "Our Day Will Come" which she delivers with righteous conviction.

Listening to the album without looking at the credits, one might be very surprised to discover that Robinson contributes three original songs, so seamlessly do they fit in with the standards. "Soon" sounds like it was lifted directly from the first act of a classic Broadway musical, as the tension builds between a couple fated to take the plunge into romance. *"It's such a thrill to write a song and bring it to the band,"* Robinson says. *"I'm very collaborative. We try different things. I'm really proud of the fact that I write my own charts, and that I can put my name on some of these songs."*

Born in New Rochelle, New York and raised in Stamford, Conn., Robinson grew up in a sylvan setting and spent much of her adolescence climbing trees and enjoying nature. But after hanging out with a highly musical family that lived nearby she was inspired to explore the piano at home, and learned the basics from her mother. By high school she was playing guitar, writing and performing her own songs whenever she got the chance. Realizing that music was her calling, but with little family support for a career as a performer, she earned a music education degree from Manhattanville College with a major

**BIO  
cont'd**

in piano. *"I wanted to be a composer, but my parents said I would never be able to support myself, so I got into music education,"* Robinson says. *"When I got out of college I taught music to children. I continued writing my own music, which kept me sane and alive."*

In 1976 Robinson moved to the Bay Area with her partner at the time, and found work teaching music at private schools in the East Bay. Still intent on developing her craft as a singer/songwriter, she had started singing solo without accompanying herself after a mishap with her guitar. Working various jobs, including floor waxing, to pay the bills, she was given free rein by a client to explore his record collection. *"I grabbed an album by Carmen McRae, and it totally amazed me,"* she recalls. *"I didn't know people sang like that."*

Bitten by the jazz bug, Robinson undertook years of intensive, self-directed study, buying albums and catching masters like Betty Carter, Etta Jones, and Ella Fitzgerald in concert. She immersed herself in the music of McRae, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, Irene Kral, Sheila Jordan, Shirley Horn, Carol Sloane, Dinah Washington, Jo Stafford and Kay Starr. *"I loved piano too, so that was a major thing, listening to Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Monk, and McCoy Tyner,"* Robinson says.

Hanging out at the San Francisco jazz spot Storyville she met bassist Scott Steed, and he offered to play for her students at Oakland's Beacon Day School. He brought pianist Art Khu and drummer Bud Spangler to the morning presentation, and she ended up sitting in with the trio on "Give Me the Simple Life." The encounter launched an ongoing creative partnership between Robinson and Spangler, a Grammy Award-nominated producer whose credits include sessions by Cedar Walton, Mark Levine, Taylor Eigsti, Anton Schwartz, Mimi Fox, and vocalists Kitty Margolis, Clairdee, Ed Reed, and Nicolas Bearde. *"Bud said, 'Hey, you're good, I can help you,'"* Robinson says. *"Bud was the angel in my life. He's produced all three CDs. He's been my mentor and a dear friend."*

She continued her education, studying at the Stanford Jazz Workshop and JazzCamp West. By the time she released her debut album, 2001's ***On My Way To You***, she had emerged as a stand-out on the Bay Area's burgeoning jazz vocal scene. The album garnered enthusiastic praise from critics and veteran masters like Carol Sloane, who wrote, *"Hers is a white chocolate sound, intense and pure, swinging and bitter-sweet. Keep your ears and eyes open for more Ellen Robinson."*

She followed up with 2006's ***Mercy!*** an album gleaned from performances in Berkeley and San Francisco between 2001-2005. The album documents her with her first band, and with a later incarnation featuring bassist John Wiitala, drummers Jeff Marrs and John Arkin, and soul-drenched saxophonist Charles McNeal. The album also received rapturous reviews, like the website AllAboutJazz's rave, *"This singer delivers from the heart. That's her forte...Robinson interprets lyrics in such a way that we feel them completely."*

A gifted educator who teaches at the Jazzschool in Berkeley and Community Music Center in San Francisco, Robinson directs several vocal programs and ensembles, including a musical theater workshop at Stagebridge and the Anything Goes Chorus, a community chorus that has given public performances and free concerts at retirement homes, homeless shelters, prisons and half-way houses since the early 1980s.

She doesn't see much separation between her work in the classroom or on stage. With ***Don't Wait Too Long*** she offers an object lesson in music's transformative power, a power that she both embodies and transmits. *"As a teacher I feel like I'm a performer, and as a performer I feel like a teacher,"* Robinson says. *"I want people to be entertained and I want them to feel different after they've heard my music."*

## QUOTES

# Ellen Robinson

"Ellen Robinson is blessed with great pipes."

**Jazz Improv Magazine**

"The urgency with which she delivers each tune is palpable. Her enthusiasm and love of the music is infectious. Her willingness to bare her soul through each song is courageous. We become privy to her journey...a ride through the joy, the pain, the celebration of life. It's all here."

**Melanie Berzon, KCSM**

"Hers is a white chocolate sound, intense and pure, swinging and bitter-sweet. Keep your ears and eyes open for more Ellen Robinson."

**Carol Sloane – jazz vocalist**

"The musicianship of her group, her repertoire, the arrangements, and her delivery places her in a pantheon of the very best performers we've had here."

**Norman Landsberg, Piedmont Piano Company, Oakland, CA**

"To compare Ellen Robinson's vocal timbre to that of Irene Kral may be the ultimate compliment to Ms. Robinson. But there's a hint of Irene present here on some excellent material. Robinson is the kind of singer who could silence a jazz club in a hurry."

**George Fendel, KMHD FM, Oregon**

"Ellen Robinson knows how to connect with an audience...she just lets it fly, and what happens is a lovely melodic parade. This singer delivers from the heart. That's her forte...Robinson interprets lyrics in such a way that we feel them completely."

**Jim Santella, All About Jazz**

"Robinson makes music that people want to call their own."

**Pacifica Tribune, Pacifica, CA**

"Phenomenal vocals and well crafted songs."

**Joe Kelley, WVOF, Fairfield, CT**

"She's got the right ideas and the voice to make them happen."

**Jerry Atkins, KTXK, Texarkana, TX**

"Ellen Robinson swings like crazy!"

**Billy Philadelphia - pianist**

"Ellen Robinson is a welcome entre into the world of jazz voices."

**Bruce Tater, KETR, Commerce, TX**

"The Oakland jazz singer's new album *Don't Wait Too Long* arrives right on time, showcasing her impressive skills as a songwriter and her gift for putting a personal stamp on American Songbook standards and more contemporary fare."

**Andy Gilbert, Bay Area jazz writer for San Jose Mercury News, Boston Globe and others**

"She has a wonderful, clear voice and a jazz feeling all the way."

**Marian McPartland**

REVIEWS

# Ellen Robinson

## Don't Wait Too Long

### Midwest Record

[www.midwestrecord.com](http://www.midwestrecord.com)

Sept. 28, 2012

Simply a straight ahead, straight up live vocal session from a jazz singer that delivers it pure, not needing to drape on any extra special sauce to dilute the taste. A nice mix of standards and originals from various periods and writers that she manages to weave into a seamless whole, this is a real treat for the jazz vocal fan looking for a pro that can hold the core all by herself. Right in the pocket throughout.

### Lee Hildebrand

Freelance music journalist

Oct. 17, 2012

Ellen Robinson's alto pipes glow like a lightning bug on a warm summer night as she sings the Lerner and Loewe standard "Almost Like Being in Love" on her third album, **Don't Wait Too Long**. Much like her predecessors Jimmy Scott and Shirley Horn, the Oakland jazz singer takes advantage of down-tempo from her slow, samba-infused backup quartet to penetrate the meanings of her material.

Robinson works wonders with Jule Styne's "Dance Only with Me," Michel LeGrand's "You Must Believe in Spring," Irving Berlin's "Be Careful, It's My Heart," Bob Telson's "Calling You," Burke and Van Heusen's "But Beautiful," and Joni Mitchell's musical arrangement of the 1895 Rudyard Kipling poem "If."

Ballads dominate the album, recorded last year at Freight & Salvage. The pace picks up from time to time, including on the swinging "Soon," one of three Robinson originals in the set. She and the band add a jazz-waltz groove to the bossa-nova-flavored Ruby and the Romantics' hit "Our Day Will Come" and treat the Madeleine Peyroux-penned title track as a sassy shuffle.

Pianist Murray Low supplies sensitive, richly voiced accompaniment throughout, while tenor saxophonist Kristen Strom's rhapsodic lines and gently biting tone brings Stan Getz to mind. Bassist Sam Bevan and drummer Dan Foltz complete the combo. (EMR Music)

## REVIEWS cont'd

### **Brent Black**

Jazz journalist: [Criticaljazz.com](http://Criticaljazz.com)

Oct. 5, 2012

***Don't Wait Too Long*** is the third release from Bay Area vocalist Ellen Robinson and will be dropping on October 16th. This wonderful live set includes some eclectic numbers from Joni Mitchell, Michel LeGrand, and Irving Berlin as well as three Robinson originals that serve her well as both a prolific vocalist and lyricist.

While there is a tightly clustered pack of female jazz singers, there is all ways room for one more and Robinson fills the bill well. Robinson demonstrated an understanding that some "singers" simply either do not get or they spend an entire career struggling with connectivity. The connectivity is only heightened on this live set as the quartet playing with her seems to have the same understanding of what musical artistry is all about. Opening up with "Dance Only With Me" pianist Murray Low turns in a harmonically engaging solo to complement a somewhat melancholy version of the Jule Styne tune. The brushwork of drummer Dan Foltz and lyrical bassist Sam Bevan compliment Robinson's talent well. A slightly odd metered swing that is a Robinson original "Soon" could easily pass as a standard if one was not familiar with the set list here. Kristen Strom is the perfect counterpoint on tenor sax and rounds out a rock solid ensemble. The cover of Joni Mitchell's "If", which is actually a Rudyard Kipling poem, kicks off with bassist Sam Bevan and is an organic testament to what true vocal artistry is about.

Remaining true to the artistic sense of self especially in the more commercially oriented realm of vocal jazz is a difficult trick to pull off but Robinson is obviously comfortable with who she is and where she intends to go as an artist and this is half the battle in the music business today. Ellen Robinson marches to her own beat and places her own indelible stamp on some classic tunes that turn ***Don't Wait Too Long*** into a delightfully entertaining release.

### **John Shelton Ivany**

Top 21

[www.jsitop21.com](http://www.jsitop21.com)

Nov. 25, 2012

***Don't Wait Too Long*** is the third admirable album by Ellen Robinson and her matchless band. We are treated to live music, which I love, which epitomizes her mission – to put adults in touch with their inner selves. As Bruce Springsteen said: "She's all that heaven will allow."

## REVIEWS cont'd

### Paul Freeman

Writer/editor: Los Angeles Times Syndicate, Tribune Syndicate, New York Times Syndicate, San Francisco Chronicle's Sunday Datebook and Gavin Report  
popcultureclassics.com  
Dec. 10, 2012

This exceptional Bay Area-based jazz singer's third album, recorded live at Berkeley's Freight & Salvage, is beautifully beguiling. There's an unpretentious elegance to Robinson's voice and she displays a rare rapport with each lyric. There's completely credibility and honest feeling in every syllable. A fine band is equally warm and nuanced in its approach, under the expert guidance of producer Bud Spangler. Among the highlights are sensitive renditions of "Almost Like Being In Love," "Calling You," "But Beautiful" and "Be Careful It's My Heart," as well as a swinging "Our Day Will Come."

## TEACHING

# Ellen Robinson

toward mastery of nearly any genre of song.

Ellen has been teaching singers and directing vocal groups for over 35 years and is a member of **NATS** (National Association of Teachers of Singing). She is currently the Director of the Anything Goes Choruses in San Francisco (Community Music Center) and Oakland (First Congregational Church). These are community choruses she founded in 1980. In addition, Ellen teaches jazz singing and chart writing classes at the **Jazzschool** in Berkeley, conducts musical theater workshops for seniors at **Stagebridge** in Oakland, and teaches a beginning singing class for women called **Swinghft Singers**. She has been a vocal instructor on the faculty of **U.C. Berkeley Extension** and a choral conductor with the **Oakland Youth Chorus**.

Ellen's tireless efforts as an educator and cultural activist were recognized in 2011 with a prestigious **Jefferson Award**. She doesn't see much separation between her work in the classroom or on stage. *"As a teacher I feel like I'm a performer, and as a performer I feel like a teacher. I want people to be entertained and I want them to feel different after they've heard my music."*

Ellen's teaching is enriched by a firm foundation of education and training: she earned a Bachelor of Music degree focusing on piano and voice from Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York, and studied Music Education on the graduate level at several universities in New York: C.W. Post, Hofstra University, Bank Street College of Education, and SUNY-Stony Brook. She has studied with the legendary **Mark Murphy**, jazz vocalist **Madeline Eastman**, scat singer extraordinaire **Kitty Margolis**, and cabaret performer **Faith Winthrop**.

One of the San Francisco Bay Areas busiest music directors, jazz singer Ellen Robinson has helped take many a vocalist from the level of simply wanting to sing to the stage. She has worked with literally thousands of students throughout her life and continues to be a gifted and dedicated vocal coach. She is notable for arranging and guiding vocalists

# On My Way To You

DISCOGRAPHY

Ellen  
Robinson

- 1. From This Moment On** 3:52  
Cole Porter
- 2. There Are Such Things** 3:44  
Stanley Adams, Abel Baer, George Meyer
- 3. Feels Like Home** 5:29  
Randy Newman
- 4. Throw It Away** 3:48  
Abbey Lincoln
- 5. Give Me The Simple Life** 3:57  
Harry Ruby, Rube Bloom
- 6. How Deep Is The Ocean** 5:43  
Irving Berlin
- 7. I Will** 3:22  
John Lennon, Paul McCartney
- 8. On And On** 6:05  
Stephen Bishop
- 9. That Song You Left Unsung** 4:42  
Ellen Robinson
- 10. Let's Do It** 3:33  
Cole Porter
- 11. On My Way To You** 5:43  
Michel Legrand, Alan & Marilyn Bergman

**Ben Flint** – piano  
**John Schifflett** – bass  
**Andrew Eberhard** – drums  
**Harvey Wainapel** – soprano/tenor sax, clarinet

*Produced by Ellen Robinson  
with Bud Spangler*

*Recorded at*  
Bay Records  
Berkeley CA  
[www.bayrec.com](http://www.bayrec.com)

*Engineering*  
Mike Cogan

*Mastering*  
Ken Lee, Ken Lee Mastering  
Oakland, CA

# Mercy!

## Ellen Robinson Live

### DISCOGRAPHY

Ellen  
Robinson

**1. FLY AWAY** 4:15

(B) Ellen Robinson

**2. EVERYBODY'S CRYIN' MERCY** 4:36

(A) Mose Allison

**3. LET'S FALL IN LOVE** 4:38

(B) Harold Arlen, Ted Koehle - Arranged by Ellen Robinson

**4. THE DIMMING OF THE DAY** 6:32

(C) Richard Thompson - Vocal duet with Ben Flint

**5. MY BABY JUST CARES FOR ME** 4:45

(A) Walter Donaldson, Gus Kahn

**6. STILL CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS** 4:09

(D) Paul Simon

**7. HOW I WISH (ASK ME NOW)** 6:11

(D) Thelonious Monk, Jon Hendricks

**8. THEM THERE EYES** 3:12

(B) Maceo Pinkard,  
William Tracey, Doris Tauber

**9. WHERE DO YOU START?** 3:17

(C) Mandel, Bergman

**10. ONE OF YOU AND ME** 3:22

(B) Ellen Robinson

**11. HEAVEN DOWN HERE** 4:59

(D) Phil Roy, John Shanks,  
Rick Neigher, Jim Carrey

**12. HOLD ON** 2:39

(C) Ellen Robinson

**13. IT GOES LIKE IT GOES** 3:29

(D) David Shire, Norman Gimbel

**14. THE FIDDLE AND THE DRUM** 3:18

(A) Joni Mitchell - Arranged by Ellen Robinson

**Ben Flint** - piano (1 - 14)

**John Schifflett** - bass (2, 5)

**John Wiitala** - bass (1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13)

**John Arkin** - drums (6, 7, 11, 13)

**Andrew Eberhard** - drums (2, 5, 14)

**Jeff Marrs** - drums (1, 3, 8, 10)

**Charles McNeal** - soprano & tenor sax (1, 2, 3, 5, 8,  
9, 10, 12)

**(A) Freight and Salvage**

**Berkeley, CA - 11.26.01**

Ben Flint - piano, John Schifflett - bass,  
Andrew Eberhard - drums,  
Charles McNeal - tenor sax  
Lou Judson - recording engineer

**(B) Freight and Salvage**

**Berkeley, CA - 10.17.03**

Ben Flint - piano, John Wiitala - bass  
Jeff Marrs - drums,  
Charles McNeal - soprano & tenor sax  
Lou Judson - recording engineer

**(C) Community Music Center**

**San Francisco, CA - 2.28.04**

Ben Flint - piano, John Schifflett - bass,  
Charles McNeal - tenor sax  
Steve Watkins - recording engineer

**(D) Community Music Center**

**San Francisco, CA - 2.26.05**

Ben Flint - piano, John Wiitala - bass,  
John Arkin - drums  
Bud Spangler - recording engineer  
Steve Watkins - Nikki Ben Natan - assistant engineers

**Produced by Ellen Robinson  
with Bud Spangler**

**Mixing and Post Production**

Dan Feiszli, [www.studiorhythm.com](http://www.studiorhythm.com)  
Albany, CA

**Mastering**

Ken Lee, Ken Lee Mastering  
Oakland, CA

# Don't Wait Too Long

DISCOGRAPHY

Ellen  
Robinson

**1. Dance Only With Me** 4:52  
Jule Styne, Betty Comden, Adolph Greene

**2. Soon** 6:49  
Ellen Robinson

**3. If** 8:34  
Joni Mitchell, Rudyard Kipling

**4. Almost Like Being In Love** 6:41  
Alan Jay Lerner, Frederick Loewe  
Arranged by Ellen Robinson

**5. The Storm** 5:10  
Ellen Robinson

**6. You Must Believe in Spring** 5:29  
Michel LeGrand, Jacques Demy,  
Alan & Marilyn Bergman

**7. Tick Tock** 5:32  
Ellen Robinson

**8. Be Careful It's My Heart** 7:27  
Irving Berlin  
Arranged by Ellen Robinson

**9. Our Day Will Come** 4:38  
Mort Garson, Bob Hilliard

**10. Calling You** 5:04  
Robert Telson  
Kristen Strom, backup vocals

**11. But Beautiful** 6:29  
Johnny Burke, James Van Heusen

**12. Don't Wait Too Long** 4:50  
Jesse Harris, Larry Klein, Madeline Peyroux

**Murray Low** – piano, keyboards  
**Sam Bevan** – bass  
**Dan Foltz** – drums  
**Kristen Strom** – soprano/tenor sax

*Produced by Bud Spangler  
and Ellen Robinson*

*Recorded live 5/14/2011  
Freight and Salvage  
Berkeley, CA  
[www.thefreight.org](http://www.thefreight.org)*

**Engineering**  
Recording engineer: Brian Walker  
[www.articulateaudio.com](http://www.articulateaudio.com)  
Assistant engineer: Bud Spangler  
[www.budspangler.com](http://www.budspangler.com)

**Mixing & Mastering**  
Jeremy Goody, Megasonic Sound  
Oakland, CA  
[www.megasonicsound.com](http://www.megasonicsound.com)