

MELISSA MORGAN
Biography

Melissa Morgan was born in New York City in 1980 and raised in Teaneck, New Jersey. Her first exposure to jazz was through her grandmother's record collection, which included recordings by Billie Holiday, Dinah Washington, Sarah Vaughan, Nancy Wilson and other luminaries.

That same grandmother was a classical singer in the 1930s, and young Melissa's first steps as a singer followed a similar path – piano lessons beginning at age four, along with vocal training in classical music, opera and choral music with orchestral arrangements. In addition to her training, she attended the opera and the symphony with her parents on a regular basis.

During high school, Morgan performed in local choirs and eventually with classical vocal groups throughout the U.S. and around the world. Among her travels was a seven-country tour of Europe with the U.S. Youth Chorale in 1996. Throughout high school, her vocal talents were recognized with numerous awards.

But somewhere during her teen years, a musical interest of a different kind took hold. "Jazz was something I kind of stumbled upon, really," says Morgan. "I have a close friend who is a jazz drummer. Through that friendship, and through my grandmother's record collection, I started gravitating toward the emotional element of jazz. It was something that came across as very intense to me. I guess there was an organic element in jazz that I wasn't experiencing in classical music."

Morgan enrolled in SUNY Purchase Conservatory of Music in 1998, and studied with several prominent artists, including Yolanda Bavan, Jon Faddis and Roseanna Vitro. She performed with the school's jazz and Latin jazz orchestras and was a featured vocalist with the Purchase Jazz Band during a 1999 tour of Spain. She graduated in 2002 with a bachelors degree in jazz vocal performance.

After college, Morgan enjoyed honing her performance skills while steadily gigging at many of the best new York jazz clubs. Her ongoing Sunday night gig at Smoke was especially memorable. "The caliber of musicians that ran through that club was always so

high,” she recalls. “You had a combination of up-and-coming young musicians along with a lot of living legends – guys like Cedar Walton, Harold Mabern, George Coleman and Eddie Henderson.”

In September 2004, Morgan was named a semi-finalist in the Thelonius Monk International Jazz Competition in Washington, DC, where she performed in front of a panel of high-profile judges: Quincy Jones, Al Jarreau, Kurt Elling, Jimmy Scott, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Flora Purim. “Having your name attached to that competition says a lot. I really had no idea what I was getting into. When I got there, the prestige level of it all, and the people who were present there, was just overwhelming. It really did open some doors.”

Morgan moved to the opposite coast in 2006, landing in Los Angeles – a much different place, she soon learned, from her native New York City. “The lifestyle in L.A. is completely different,” she says. “The people are different. Everything was a culture shock for me. The music and the musicians are just as great as what you find in New York, but it’s just a very different scene. It took a little while to get comfortable here.”

But none of the changes have impeded her development as an artist and a performer. In 2007, Morgan appeared with the Next Generation of Jazz All-Stars at the Concord Fujitsu Jazz Festival in Japan with trumpeter Christian Scott, pianist Taylor Eigsti and alto saxophonist Benny Reid.

“I was a little concerned that I wouldn’t be as well received as the guys,” Morgan recalls, “considering that they had already released albums and I hadn’t yet. Or maybe my style wouldn’t mesh well with theirs. But in the end, the shows turned out great. We played in some great venues and we were all very well received.”

Morgan signed with Telarc International in the summer of 2008. Her debut recording, *Until I Met You*, promises to be “a gritty, classic jazz recording,” says Morgan. “I wanted it to be soulful and emotional, and I wanted it to run the gamut of happy and sad and everything in between, with lyrics that are very potent. I also wanted it to be like those classic jazz recordings of the ‘50s and ‘60s, where there are a lot of musicians on it and there’s a real family sense to it. That’s exactly what this record has turned out to be.”

Until I Met You is scheduled for release in March 2009.

###