
THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

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Artist profile: Cheryl Jewell

Margaret Bikman - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Vocalist Cheryl Jewell, who grew up in Alaska, Tacoma and Oak Harbor, has worked with John Entwistle of The Who, has backed Roger McGuinn and Randy Newman, and has opened for Edgar Winter and Leon Russell. She's sung rock, pop, blues, alt-country and even TV jingles, but lately she's been in the Bayside Recording Studio preparing for a jazz standards album for release this fall. She sings with the Saltwater Octet at 3 p.m. Sunday, July 5, in a free concert at Fairhaven Village Green. For more on her music, go to cheryljewell.com.

Question: What were you like as a child?

Answer: I had one thing on my mind: singing! I was shy and introverted, but I loved to sing in the bath tub. Still do!

Q: Have you always enjoyed being onstage?

A: No. Not always, but I do now. I was fairly introverted in elementary and junior high school. Got the lead in "Oliver" in seventh grade, which was my first big stage show. I had to get over being shy quickly. It was still difficult, even in high school where I played "Laurie" in Oklahoma. The palms of my hands were always sweaty during those productions!



Q: What's your musical history?

A: In junior high and high school I was in jazz and madrigal choirs, as well as sitting in with the stage band. I was in a rock band during those years with my classmates and we would play for school dances. After graduation, I went to college at Western Washington University, but I was so itching to sing that I joined a touring top-40 band. From there, I was fortunate enough to sing on some national jingles; get a record deal with my all-girl band, Rachel Rachel; play with Eddie Van Halen and other notables, as well as have my voice in a movie with Charlie Sheen.

Q: What have been some of the highlights?

A: Opening for Edgar Winter and Leon Russell as Tim Bogert's lead singer (Beck, Bogert, Appice, Vanilla Fudge) was really exciting. Singing as backup vocalist for the National Association of Songwriters Concert in Los Angeles, I found myself on stage backing Roger McGuinn, the Motown songwriting team Holland/Dozier/Holland, and Randy Newman. Recently, upon entering the Seattle-Kobe Sister City Jazz Vocalist competition, I was fortunate to place first runner-up to Pacific Northwest great Greta Matassa. Right now, I'm working on a jazz standards album with co-producer Chip Westerfield of Bayside Recording, here in Bellingham. I plan on releasing it this fall in time for the Anacortes Jazz Festival, on Oct. 16.

Q: What's the attraction of jazz for you?

A: The big band and the octet give me almost the same rush as playing with a touring rock band! Plus, I love the music from the era of "standards." The energy created by a bigger band is really exciting. The combo material gives me everything intimate and I can really sing, experiment and improvise, as well as try out my original material. Jazz is the music that speaks to my heart and my passions, as well as allowing me to really sing a "singer's" song.

Q: You've worked with some pretty incredible people. Any cool stories you can share?

A: When I moved to L.A. to pursue music, I decided to get a day job in the music industry and pursue things that way, making "connections" from the inside. I was at an entertainment management and PR firm for a few years and became part of the family to not only my bosses but some clients, like Lou Rawls. Lou had some great stories and he had my all-girl band Rachel Rachel on his national telethon ("The Lou Rawls Parade of Stars Telethon"). When I hear his voice on the radio, it's still like he's right there with me in the office. I eventually got my first record deal and was managed by that agency.

I joined alt-neo country-rock band Tin Star in L.A. and one of our gigs was opening for Jerry Lee Lewis at the Palomino Club in North Hollywood. We were pretty stoked about it, but after the gig he was supposed to pay us a cut, but he stiffed us. We had a good laugh over it and still enjoy telling that story!

Our band (Rachel Rachel) decided to do a remake of "Carry on My Wayward Son" by Kansas. Couldn't believe it when Kerry Livgren of Kansas wanted to play guitar with us in our video and Dan Huff played the guitar solo in our recorded version. Geez...don't think that will happen again!

Q: What's fun about playing gigs in Bellingham, compared to the bigger cities you've played?

A: I love how accepting Bellingham is of music of all genres. This town is so creative that it has an energy in the air. I feel like I can work out my jazz chops here. It's home, it's comfortable, it's supportive with both the venues and the people. I purposely moved here as I absolutely fell in love with everything Bellingham.

Q: What else do you enjoy?

A: For many years, it was my goal to move to Bellingham so that I could enjoy the arts, the hiking, biking, skiing, and paddling, oh my! Every spare minute I can find, I'm out there trying to enjoy this beautiful, magical place. I also enjoy working with voice and performance students and am hoping to get a grant to take big band music to retirement

communities, as well as record an album of WWII songs from the "American" years in the war. I would love to keep that music alive for future generations and to honor the vets that provided our freedom. I joined "Bellingham Fit" and will be working on the half-marathon coming up this September. Of all the cities I've lived in, the quality of life here is the best I've ever known. I feel like I'm on vacation, just living here!

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