

Jaimee Paul Biography

In the summer of 2008, Jaimee Paul was working as a backup singer for country music legend Wynonna Judd, and they happened to be doing a gig in Alaska (no, they did not get to meet Sarah Palin). Jaimee was sitting in her hotel room when the phone rang, and on the other end was Nashville music impresario Bill Gaither. “Get your music over to Green Hill,” Gaither told her. Less than six months later, *At Last*, the most remarkable debut album by a major new jazz-and-standards singer, is being released. A collection of signature songs associated with the great female icons of jazz and pop, *At Last* features the distinctive sound of Ms. Paul backed by Nashville’s own jazz piano icon, Beegie Adair, and her trio, as well as a sumptuous string orchestra arranged and conducted by Jeff Steinberg. Between Jaimee’s big, soul-drenched voice and Jeff’s big, classically informed orchestrations, *At Last* is an over whelming experience.

“For me, *At Last* was a very personal experience,” says Jaimee Paul. “All the great lady singers that we saluted were inspirations to me, and all of the songs we selected are among my innermost personal favorites. Some of them I have a very long history with: my grandfather was a WW2 veteran, and his favorite song ever was ‘Sentimental Journey,’ and we used to listen to it together. ‘What A Difference A Day Makes’ always gets me thinking about my wonderful husband, Leif (Shires), and the incredible day that we first met. On the other hand, ‘Stormy Weather’ never fails to start me thinking about all the lousy relationships I’ve been through – that we’ve all been through. ‘Whatever Lola Wants’ shows that every girl, I think, has a little Lola – the bad girl – in her.” She adds, “For me to sing live with Beegie’s trio and the incredible string arrangements of Jeff Steinberg, was just more than I ever could have asked for. This record was a dream come true.” It took less than half a season, from Summer to Winter, for *At Last* to be planned, conceived, produced, recorded, mixed and released, but it has taken the better part of a lifetime – albeit one that has not been particularly long, so far – for Jaimee Paul to get where she is and for this album to come about.

“I was always involved with music,” the fair-haired Southern Illinois native reports. Her parents are both musical: her mom taught music and piano in the public school system for 30 years, and her dad studied music in college before deciding on a career in engineering. “I like to think I use both sides of the brain,” she says, “mathematics and science from my dad and music and art from my mother.”

Jaimee’s love of music was instigated by her parents and then cultivated equally in both the church and school. At the age of five she began studying classical piano for almost ten years, and from the third grade on she also played the French horn in school bands (both the marching and the stationary variety). For all these years, she also sang in both school and church choirs. Jaimee was also attracted almost equally to two kinds of music that are not as different as some people imagine: gospel and jazz. Both have a tradition of

individual interpretation and embellishment, not to mention a strong rhythmic drive, which appealed to Jaimee at an early age.

In the eighth grade, Jaimee, who has lived with Type 1 Diabetes since she was seven years old, was given a solo with her church choir. In order to distinguish her performance from what the other kids were doing, she decided to change a few notes, in a way that was inspired by the soul singers she heard on the radio. Her solo, innocent as it was, literally shocked some of the more conservative church ladies. “It was a more hand-clappin’, knee-slapping, visceral performance style than they were used to,” she says. It was the first and last time she sang solo on a Sunday morning service; however, she was permitted to follow her own star and sing the way she liked in the Sunday evening rituals.

Jaimee was also learning jazz standards and show tunes. “When I played in the school bands, the music I always liked best were the swing-based numbers,” she says, and she also played “Adelaide,” the female lead in her high school production of Frank Loesser’s *Guys And Dolls*. Ironically, although she was primarily singing, all of her music training was in theory, French horn, and piano – she never took formal voice lessons. By high school, she was teaching music as well; when her mother had more private students than she could handle, the teenage Jaimee began giving lessons. She attended Belmont University in Nashville. “I didn’t need a degree to prove that I could sing,” she says, “plus, I really loved the business side of music, so I decided to get my degree in that.” In addition to majoring in music business, she continued to pursue both gospel and jazz, participating in Belmont’s Gospel Showcase. She also interned for many music business companies in Nashville, including Sony Music (where she worked with the marketing team that helped “break” The Dixie Chicks). Jaimee also sang backup for a band led by Benjy Gaither, whose father, Bill Gaither, would later play a major role in her career. Jaimee was given an opportunity to audition for Bill Gaither at the age of 19, but she declined, feeling that she wasn’t yet ready. “I told him, ‘It’s not my time yet, but someday you’ll hear me.’”

After graduating Belmont in 1999, Jaimee worked part-time for two venerable music business institutions, BMI and CCM Magazine, while steadily working as a backup singer on recording sessions. At one point, her college music professor arranged for her to have an interview with a famous Nashville gospel label. When she called to talk to her contact at the company, he asked point blank if she was black. Stunned, Jaimee had to admit that she wasn’t. The voice then told her, “Well, if you’re not black, then stay out of our industry. There’s no way we could ever sell a white girl to our audience.” (The employee who delivered this pronouncement was fired a short time later.) Jaimee was shocked, but she decided it was God’s way of encouraging her to follow her other major passion, jazz and the Great American Songbook.

In addition to her ongoing jazz gig, which began at Ellendale’s restaurant in 2004, she was working more and more as a session singer on country and pop dates, eventually reaching the point where she devoted herself full-time to her music. That same year, she met and fell in love with Leif Shires, a Nashville-based

first-call session trumpet player. They were married in 2007, and continue to work together as often as they can, usually at Ellendale's. Jaimee also self-produced her own album, *Angel Like You*, that intermingled jazz standards with three original songs, including the title track. She has performed with such luminaries as Lyle Lovett and Wynonna Judd, and, as mentioned above, she was touring with Wynonna in Alaska when Bill Gaither called and instructed her to present herself to Green Hill Productions.

This past summer has been a whirlwind of activity for Jaimee. In short order, just as the Judd entourage was returning home to Nashville, she met with Greg Howard of Green Hill. By the next weekend, Greg came to catch her at Ellendale's, and he wound up signing both her and her husband to their own individual contracts. Their albums were produced in near-record time – amazingly quickly for such high-quality productions – and January 27 is the official release date for both. In 2006 Jaimee signed a songwriter deal with Warner/Chappell Music, publishing home of many of the Standards on her album. “I can’t wait to see what God has in store for Leif and me. For He has given us a future and a hope; a hope that something will eventually pan out in this silly music industry, if it’s in His will, of course. After all, God is the ultimate creator of great music.”

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