

Roland Perrin

Born in New York City, jazz pianist and composer Roland Perrin spent most of his childhood roaming the planet with his itinerant family, so it is not surprising that he developed a global view of music. Although he studied and continues to investigate classical music, it is through the practical experience of global music, viewed from a classical mind-set, that he has found his voice as a composer:

Working as a session pianist in the jazz and world music scene, Roland has toured and recorded with many artists including Dudu Pukwana, Jonas Gwangwa (South Africa), Chris Macgregor's Brotherhood of Breath (South Africa), Aster Aweke (Ethiopia), Moses Fan-Fan (Congo), Najma Akhtar (India), Rey Crespo, Osvaldo Chacon, Juan de Marcos (Cuba),

Roberto Pla (Colombia), Victor Hugo, Tumbaito (Venezuela), Gustavo Marques (Brazil), Guida de Palma (Portugal), Salsa Celtica (Scotland/Cuba), Louise Rutkowski et al.

Under his own name he has released three CDs: Evidence "See You Later" (Trio Records), The Blue Planet Orchestra "Introducing The Blue Planet Orchestra" (Blue Planet Records) and Hertfordshire Chorus and The BPO "Songs from the Cage/Trio Classics" (BPR).

As a composer, Roland has received many commissions and has also written music for the Associated Board Jazz Piano Syllabus, John O'Neil Saxophone Method and the Rock School Piano Syllabus.



First Hand Records has not been able by reasonable enquiry to ascertain the identity of the owner of the copyright in this photograph. For enquiries, please contact info@firsthandrecords.com



Photo taken by Peter Schiazza

Thanks to Peter Bromley, Digby Fairweather, Dave Moses, Helder Pack, Guy Silk, Nick Staines, Nick Taylor

This album is dedicated to beautiful Lucy. Eternally in our minds.

FHR10



Wendy Nieper

first flight

with
Roland
Perrin

Dave Moses
Guy Silk
Helder Pack

featuring
Digby Fairweather

Wendy Nieper – First Flight

When you break open the packaging of a new album and put it into the CD player, do you always start at the beginning? Maybe it is years of building radio programmes and reviewing CDs, but I tend to make for the standards first. Of course it is interesting to hear completely new music — and there's plenty of it on offer here — but I confess to having started listening to this album with *Good Bait* and *Ponciana*. The reasoning goes that you'll quickly get the measure of a singer and her accompanists according to how they tackle familiar material. I wasn't more than half a bar into *Good Bait* when my ears pricked up. Here was Tadd Dameron's epitome of a four-four swing theme transferred into a dancing 6/8 rhythm. After a quick zip through the vocalise of the verse, a nice scat chorus is followed by some deft unison between voice and piano. Meanwhile, *Ponciana* escapes nicely from the shadow of Ahmad Jamal, and becomes a fresh-sounding piece, with some inventive vocal harmonies on the introductory theme and a sweetly sung chorus that steers a neat course between the *gauche ingénue* qualities of an Astrud Gilberto and the more knowing approach of a Julie London. Clearly Wendy Nieper is a singer who is prepared to tackle familiar material with originality, and she is paced every step of the way by pianist and, on several tracks, composer, Roland Perrin.

I knew Roland's work from the Blue Planet Orchestra, and as a pianist who had worked with many visiting stars, especially the South Africans in exile who had congregated around the Brotherhood of Breath. I had not realised that like Wendy Nieper, he had a foot, if not an entire leg, in the classical world as well.

For pianists, there are plenty of precedents for straddling the classical and jazz worlds. Fats Waller and James P. Johnson were both accomplished classical players, as was Art Tatum. Bud Powell recorded his personal take on J. S. Bach, and more recently both Chick Corea and Keith Jarrett have moved effectively between the worlds of the Mozartian concert hall and the jazz club. It is less usual for a singer to make a reputation in both the jazz and classical worlds.

Wendy Nieper, however, is someone who has, with duo recordings of Chopin, Canteloube, Sondheim and Bernstein to her credit, as well as a critically acclaimed recording of Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* for eight voices and orchestra, with the Gothenburg Symphony under Peter Eötvös.

"I focussed on classical singing first," she told me, "because it demands that you train your voice before you reach a certain

age. Classical singing involves a completely different technique from jazz, because you have to develop a core sound, and aim for very clear pronunciation. I've always stressed that what I do involves two very different voices. The classical voice is designed to project. It's very loud, and has a brilliance and ring to it. My jazz voice, on the other hand, is very quiet and intimate, and it plays on things that the microphone gives you. It can be breathy; you can distort your vowel sounds for effect, and be more casual about your consonants. It comes from a different place physically, so you have to change your vocal position."

The opening track, *Blower's Daughter* makes this point perfectly, with Wendy caressing the lyric in a manner a classical singer could not contemplate. Yet the purity of her sound and her use of different registers is a clue to the rigorous training she has undergone, and her mastery of vocal technique. Originally, she had intended to give the first chorus of *Solamente* a classical treatment, projecting her soprano voice over Perrin's deft classically inspired rhythmic figures. But it sounded wrong, and instead she ended up with the humming chorus that introduces Pablo Neruda's Spanish lyrics. The closest she comes to revealing her classical voice is in the link between these and the English version of what she describes as a "landscape song".

Landscape is important to Wendy in her own song writing. In Roland Perrin, whom she met at a house party she threw a while ago, she has found a collaborator who shares her love of terrain, and of experiment. She says: "I love singing descriptive lyrics like in *Empty Beach* (a song about someone lost in thought on a seashore) where it runs 'Clouds drift high in a vast rose sky, time dissolves in a sea bird's cry' or 'Holding on to a silk thin thread, of images forming then quickly shed'. We experimented with the music so that in that same song we do a contrary motion scale (piano going up, voice going down) just before the words 'Can Echo' which I then echo in a different key!" From our conversation, I was intrigued to learn that Digby Fairweather's Harmon muted trumpet here is representing a seagull!

Tree also explores landscape themes, although Wendy confesses this song has been with her a long time, saying, "The rhythmic theme came from a ditty that I wrote as a kid. And Roland kindly made it into something real and quite different." Their partnership nods in the direction of the jazz tradition as well, on the quirky Monk-ish *What'll it be?*, which was written about a waitress in a restaurant where Wendy once worked in Richmond, Surrey.

Overall, the album is a highly successful blend of new takes on old material, and new takes on new material. Although she and Roland had met and discussed the music before the session, Wendy stresses that it was recorded in the age-old manner of jazz records, where four musicians who had not recorded together before arrived on the day and played music that was new to all of them. Each take was an adventure, and the same applied to the second day of recording when Helder Pack replaced Guy Silk for another voyage into the unknown. And as a bonus, Wendy adds quite a few improvised sections at the end of the songs, scatting or humming as an instrumentalist, playing off her fellow musicians, and turning the entire album into a genuine musical conversation, which like all discourses, runs deep and shallow, and hot and cold, and fast and slow, as it develops.

© 2011 Alyn Shipton (jazz critic, *The Times*)

Wendy Nieper

The English vocalist Wendy Nieper first made a name for herself as a local jazz artist in Birmingham in the 1990s whilst studying classical singing at Birmingham Conservatoire. On moving to London she joined the world famous jazz *a cappella* group The Swingle Singers, with whom she recorded five albums and performed at jazz festivals, concert halls and venues across the globe including La Scala, Milan, Châtelet Paris and Ronnie Scott's in London. Since leaving the Swingles, she has become a solo jazz artist touring throughout Italy, Austria, Germany and of course the UK. Alongside working with Roland Perrin she has performed extensively with singer/songwriter/guitarist Valentin Gerlier. As a session singer Wendy can be heard singing on the films of *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and more. Also renowned as a classical soprano (she has a first class honours degree from Birmingham Conservatoire where she is also an honorary member), Wendy has performed with numerous orchestras such as the London Sinfonietta, *Gothenburg Symphony* and Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Her début solo classical CD has also been released recently and features songs by Chopin and Canteloube. Wendy is also a vocal coach for both classical and popular singers and has coached at the Gent Conservatoire (Belgium), City Lit (London), SING A cappella conventions (UK) and has been a personal coach to Sir Michael Caine.

The image shows a handwritten musical score on a five-line staff. The lyrics are written in cursive below the staff. Above the staff, there are handwritten guitar chords and some other markings. The lyrics include: "is", "The Short-er Story", "no lone no glory", "no hero in her sky", and "Can't take my". The chords include "A", "E", "G", "A/G", and "E". There are also some numbers like "6", "7", "8", "9" and some other symbols like "b", "b", "g", "b", "b".