

JANE SIBERRY

by Betty Nygaard King

for Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame

A true creative original, singer-songwriter Jane Siberry is an artist who makes unforgettably hypnotic, intimate music. With her recordings, one learns to expect – and relish – the unexpected. Siberry jettisons the musically predictable in favour of something more honestly and strikingly her own genre, her own brand, and in the process has produced commercially and critically lauded recordings.

Siberry was largely self-taught on piano and guitar. She studied music and microbiology at Ontario's University of Guelph, where she supported herself by waitressing and performed in a folk ensemble.

In 1981, Siberry released her solo debut self-titled album of her folk-pop compositions, establishing a preference for writing and controlling her own creative product. Her 1984 aptly-titled follow-up album "No Borders Here" (Duke Street Records) adopted progressive art-pop and new wave sounds, yielding a Juno nomination for most promising female vocalist and a CASBY award for best female vocalist. Buyers flocked to the album and her unique style after the MuchMusic video channel and Toronto radio stations threw their support behind her. The innovative, pulsating single *Mimi on the Beach* became her first chart hit (No. 1 on college radio; RPM's No. 68). Audiences appreciated Siberry's inventive playing with off-the-beaten-path metres, forms, and textures.

Siberry explains where her musical inspiration comes from: "I could be anywhere and something sparks my imagination and interests me enough to write about it." And, "I'm inspired everywhere I walk, inspired by the beauty."

Through the 1980s Siberry gained popularity on the folk festival circuit, leading to her first Canadian gold album, 1985's synth-pop "The Speckless Sky." It made Billboard's top 200 albums chart, reaping a Juno nomination for female vocalist of the year plus further CASBY awards, including best album. The single *One More Colour* was RPM's No. 27.

Siberry found further success with 1989's "Bound by the Beauty," but it was 1993's stripped-down "When I Was a Boy" that was hailed as a masterpiece. This album made RPM's top 50, with another Juno nomination, this time for best songwriter. The songs presented subdued, introspective will-o'-the-wisp glimpses into the mind of a unique songwriter. One of these, Siberry's biggest hit song yet, was the contemplative, ethereal *Calling All Angels*, which has since been featured on TV shows and films. With added vocals from fellow Canadian musical maverick k.d. lang, *Calling All Angels* went to RPM's adult contemporary top 10.

Soon after this success, Siberry founded her Sheeba Records company, seeking independence from Reprise-Warner USA's increasingly profit-driven expectations. She soon became known for thinking outside the box on a business level, and for being at the forefront of pioneering ideas like pay-what-you-want pricing.

All told, Siberry's music explores various styles, including jazz ("Maria"); and a novel sound collage of herself in New York City ("A Day In The Life").

By 2016, Siberry had released 15 studio albums as well as several live albums and compilations. Eternally creative, she continues to explore genres, techniques and technology, melding eclectic combinations to create new music in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Her songs have been covered by k.d. lang, Steven Page, actress Sarah Polley, the Rheostatics, and others.

Despite a prolific career, Siberry reflects: "I feel like I'm inching my way toward my prime." Her upcoming record, *In the Thicket of Our Own Unconsciousness*, marks the next chapter in her ever-evolving artistic journey.

Siberry has carved herself a significant niche through her inventiveness, creativity, sheer depth of achievement, and a unique connection to her audiences.

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