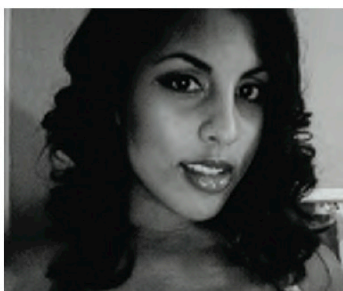


## Jessica Johnson

By Gary Heimbauer

**JJ:** Can you talk about some of the things that are currently happening in your career that you are excited about?



**JJ:** Recently, I began to compose my own music. This has been an exciting moment in my life because composing has been a goal and dream of mine for a very long time. Hopefully, with this music I will be able to touch and inspire others with the music and stories in my heart, the way music has for me throughout my life.

**JJ:** In addition to your involvement in music, what other activities help provide balance and fulfillment in your life?

**JJ:** I am a workout fanatic. I love fitness and if I don't go to the gym at least once a day I feel sluggish and down. Not only do I work at the gym as an instructor and love to take and teach all types of classes, but I also love going to the gym to see everyone, to see my little gym family.

**JJ:** Self-consciousness can be the enemy of creativity, and it takes the most strength for a singer to diffuse it. If you've experienced that kind of performance anxiety or nervousness in your career, what helped you and how did/do you overcome it?

**JJ:** I think every singer gets self-consciousness in some ways. I know sometimes before I sing, millions of questions float in and out of my consciousness. "Will they like me? Will they like my voice? Is my voice too loud for this crowd? What should I say to the audience? How can I convey this story to the best of my ability?" And the list goes on and on. But in the end all I can do is be me, sing the way I sing and sing the songs I love to sing. I know that not everyone is going to enjoy my voice and my performance. Instead of focusing on those that might not care for me I try to focus on the one woman or man in the audience whose eyes lock with mine.

**JJ:** What were some of your early influences and turning points that solidified your desire to follow this life path as an artist?

**JJ:** My parents and family have been my greatest influence of all. From a very young age they have instilled a belief in me that I can do anything and that the sky's the limit for me, and that no matter what path I choose they will always be there for me by my side supporting me every step of the way.

**JJ:** Could you talk about your musical background? What steps did you take to get where you are now? What were your studies like? How did you develop your skills?

**JJ:** I would constantly sing and dance around my house and everywhere that my family took me so first they enrolled me in small community center singing and dancing programs for children. Then they started taking lessons at Dance Arts Academy. I was there from age seven to eighteen, singing, dancing, and competing in both at local competitions throughout California. At ten, I started taking private singing lessons and I began to compete in solo competitions and at twelve I started singing the anthem for local sporting events. Both of these ventures escalated as I grew up and grew as an artist. Today I continue to sing at many sporting events and at age eighteen I started my own band which performs all over the San Francisco Bay area. ■

Visit Jessica on the web at [www.jessicajohnsononline.com](http://www.jessicajohnsononline.com)

## Cheryl Hodge

By Winthrop Bedford

**JJ:** Can you talk about some of the things that are currently happening in your career that you are excited about?



**CH:** Right now I'm pretty psyched up about my latest jazz/fusion & easy listening CD, *Indigo*. Mike Stern also was kind enough to let me write words to his tune "After You" and record it at the end of the album. If you add to this the fact that I've just released an eBook version with mp3s of my vocal book, "A Singer's Guide to the Well-Trained and Powerful Voice", then you've got a pretty full year going on, from my standpoint. You can check this stuff out on my website, [www.jazzboulevard.com](http://www.jazzboulevard.com).

**JJ:** In addition to your involvement in music, what other activities help provide balance and fulfillment in your life?

**CH:** Sometime ago I chose to do the single parent thing and it's been so, so rewarding. My 13 yr. old son keeps me young! His aspirations become mine. He's got a film studio in his bedroom, and I've got Protocols in my office; so I can hopefully start scoring the films he's doing. It's really cool. That's the real balance in my life. He plays bass too.

**JJ:** Who are some of the influential artists that have impacted your development?

**CH:** Miles, Miles, and Miles. You can really hear his influence on *Indigo*. Singers-wise it's: Ernestine Anderson, Cassandra Wilson, Ella, Nina Simone, Nancy King, Dee Daniels and Shirley Horne. But, I have to say that from a direct contact standpoint (on the bandstand) no one has influenced me more than John Stowell. He's been such an amazing mentor/friend. We've co-written an album that is pretty eclectic and "out there" called *Heres and Theres* and we're beginning another. John always challenges my ears and my sense of timing. He likes doing crazy stuff like arbitrarily throwing in odd measures without telling each other and trusting we'll end up at the same place, almost like Ornette Coleman, or something.

**JJ:** What are your top five desert island vocal albums, and please state why.

**CH:** Joni Mitchell's *For the Roses*, *Best of Ella Fitzgerald Live*, it's got to include "How High the Moon!", Cassandra Wilson's *Blue Light 'Til Dawn*, *Best of Nina Simone*, and *Chet Baker Sings*

**JJ:** What advice do you have for young singers who are looking to develop their own voice and the ability to do this professionally?

**CH:** Well, to begin with, you've got to learn the rudiments from people who know what they are doing! Find a vocal teacher who teaches posture, relaxation work, diaphragmatic breathing and development, scalar technique, and some classical, so you never lose your voice. I'm a huge believer in the McCloskey vocal method. There are hundreds of vocal methods out there that work, though. ■

Visit Cheryl Hodge on the internet at [www.jazzboulevard.com](http://www.jazzboulevard.com)