

## **CODY'S 10 x 10. INTERVIEW 6, singer Kristin Berardi**

Interview with: **Kristin Berardi**

Interview by: **Chris Cody\***



*Pianist Chris Cody... PHOTO CREDIT PAUL FAURE-BRAC*

*This interview appeared in “Loudmouth”, the e-newsletter of the Music Trust, on January 31, 2022, and can be read there at this link*

*<https://musictrust.com.au/loudmouth/chris-codys-10x10-interview-6-chris-interviews-singer-kristin-berardi/>. It is number 6 in Chris Cody's series of 10 x 10 interviews, in which he puts ten questions to ten Australian musicians.*

***CODY'S 10x10 is a musician to musician interview series outside the usual format that is brief, relevant, informative and colourful. It gives a glimpse into well-known musicians from diverse fields and backgrounds by asking questions about their music making, experience and more.***

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*\*Chris Cody is a jazz pianist, composer and band leader. Based in Paris for 25 years, he performed across Europe with Chris Cody Coalition and musicians including Herb Geller and Rick Margitza, and released numerous albums of his own music on international labels. He has written for theatre, dance, and cinema. Since returning to Australia he has released several albums and composed recent larger works “Astrolabe” and “The Outsider”.*

*Kristin Berardi, and her music, have a strength and a directness from their honesty and vulnerability. Her willingness to be open is an invitation for others to feel something, remember something and imagine something. She has received national and international recognition for her singing and her albums, and she recently moved with her two kids to Switzerland to take a teaching role at the HSLU Jazz and Folk Musik department.*



*Kristin Berardi: she has received national and international recognition for her singing and her albums... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN COURTESY LOUDMOUTH*

**Chris: What do you think of being a musician in Australia, and how does it compare to your experiences elsewhere?**

Kristin: Being in Oz had many advantages – I was quite isolated growing up (in Koumala, a small regional town in Qld) and therefore I focused my time and energy on music. Also, when at university or at an international jazz festival in Australia you would often come close to those international stars who were in Australia for the gig, perhaps more than if you were in a bigger city, or institution.

The downsides of being a musician here, compared to my experiences overseas, is that it is not valued in our society as highly. People don't seem to know that the same dedication that an elite sports person gives to their chosen field, is exactly the same as what a musician does. I would tour overseas, and the reactions from audiences were wildly different. The conversations also – not just musicians respect you, but members of the general public have more of a respect and love for the music and the

art you are making. Also, there are not as many clubs or venues wanting live music here, as some other places I've visited, and in my chosen field, jazz, certainly not as many jazz festivals as there are in smaller countries than ours.

I remember doing a small festival gig in Germany, with James Sherlock – where no-one would have known who either of us were – and they wouldn't stop clapping. It was after every song...it was actually uncomfortable. Because of what we were used to, I guess! I thought they were taking the piss (tall poppy vibes). I remember after this happened three times, James just grabbed my arm and said "what do we do?" I answered, "I think we just keep playing for them!"



*Kristin Berardi with bassist  
Brendan Clarke...  
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN  
COURTESY LOUDMOUTH*

They just loved it, and were not shy in letting us know that. It was amazing. It was a very different experience.

Not always of course, but majority of the time, yes – improvised music and jazz was much more received elsewhere.



## **What is the main thing that nourishes your music?**

Many things influence it greatly but what makes it grow is whatever I am processing at the time.

So either from my lived experience (as situations, feelings, imaginings, thoughts, memories, conversations, information, news) and what I am listening to/noticing (the sounds I am inputting – other music I am listening to/hear which is the main component, but also other sounds – bird calls, vehicle brakes, church bells, sound from machinery working etc).

## **List three things you would introduce to Australia to improve or enhance the music scene here.**

I have thought a lot about this over the years, and I do not know how you make people value something more. Perhaps more exposure to it? To be honest, this always makes me feel like the problem is too big, and I never know what I can do – and so I have just kept trying to be a good example of what a good artist is, and encourage the scene around me. Doing my part has included me just working on improving, and bettering myself, but also encouraging those around me as I think we are on the same team. I think uplifting and supporting one another is a big part of that, and the Aussie “tall poppy syndrome” is no one’s friend. It does not unify, but only creates division.



*Kristin Berardi: I do not know how you make people value something more. Perhaps more exposure to it?... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN COURTESY LOUDMOUTH*

I am proud to be an Australian artist, and until very recently have based myself there, but I want Australia to be proud of its artists, of its heritage, of its First Nations People's culture. Then we all can be one.

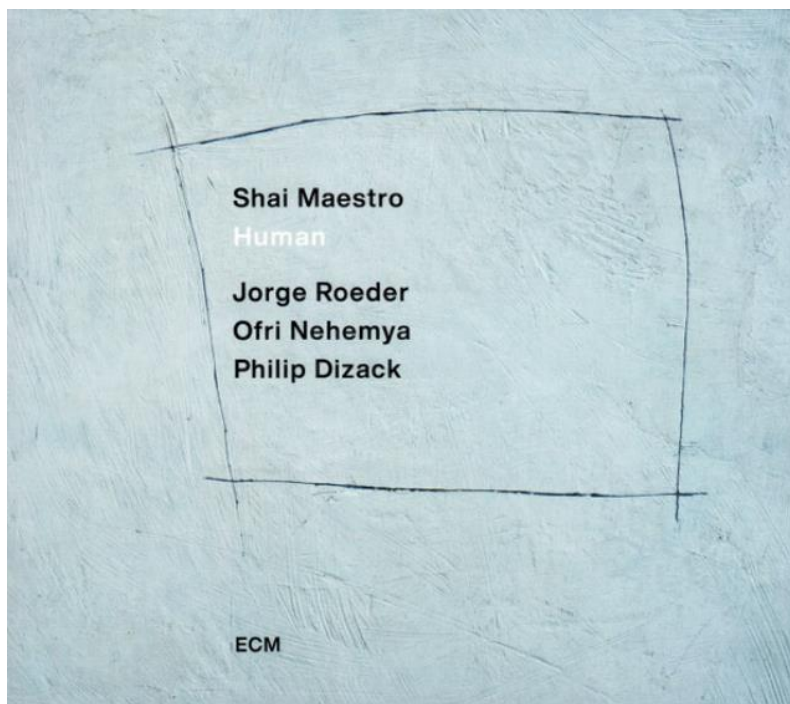
So after saying I don't know, perhaps I should say –

- 1/ More exposure to the arts – eg. in school, in daily life, live music being more common in our daily lives;
- 2/ Encouraging and supporting other artists – go to gigs, “whoop” and clap loudly if you like it (so they know!);
- 3/ The main one – our honouring of Australia's bleak beginning of settlement, and embracing our deep, rich culture that is already here – our First Nations people – the oldest culture on the planet.

Healing must take part from the foundations, otherwise the tree cannot grow to its potential and beauty.

### **What are you practising or working on at the moment?**

I am working on *GG*, a tune by Shai Maestro, from his new album *Human*, which is kicking my ass, but stimulating my brain. I'm also working on my newer songs, revisiting them, as I will be releasing a new band album on Earshift Music this year. So, practising the songs which I'll be hopefully performing somewhere this year. Also, I have a solo album coming out after the band one, so I am practising piano more, and playing and singing. The metronome is my friend. Well, I want it to be my friend.



## Would you like to share with us your best and worst musical memory?

Actually they come from the same gig:

James Sherlock and I were playing at Montreux Jazz Festival in 2007. I could hear folks cheering us on from the wings and I was thinking – no-one knows us here – what is going on?! It was Al Jarreau, and some of his band, encouraging us two scared Aus/NZ players out there on this big stage. That was wild, and so amazing. Then in the same set, I remember introducing a song in my strained French/English and I could feel a burp going to come up. I don't burp like a regular human – no, mine make noise on the ascent, so I introduced this song, while burping, and I dared not look at my brother who was in the audience, so as not to laugh out loud. It was sooooo embarrassing and I fear this happening still now. We each got a video of that performance, and James's kids used to rewind and play that bit over and over. Haha It was so bad.



*Guitarist James Sherlock (left) and Kristin Berardi, pictured in 2019... PHOTO CREDIT GEOFF NORRIS*

My most recent good memory was playing at Birdland Jazz Club in NYC with Sam Anning, Ingrid Jensen, Miro Sprague, Jerome Jennings, and Marty Jaffe. Playing my own music there. Feeling like people dug it, and being in one of the clubs I grew up hearing about. I realise that is a regular occurrence for some of my friends but it was damn special for this country girl. I was so, so grateful, and so happy that night. That was in 2019 after we had recorded an album of that music in the days before. That's the album that will be out in April this year.



My most recent bad memory was finally getting a gig to sit in with a band here in Switzerland in 2021 at a bistro. I had to race from my kids' parent teacher interview to the gig, and of course I packed snacks and drawing books/reading material for my kids while the gig was on, but not my microphone. I was sweating like nothing else, and so stressed...but I couldn't believe it – after all this time. I forgot my microphone. MEH!

### **Can you describe your challenges and how you surmount them ?**

My biggest challenges have been personally – which has meant the musical challenges seem less intense, to be honest. Some people have literally said to me that I haven't had any rough times musically, but I can assure you I'm no different to anyone else. I just chose to keep going, not let situations or others' words define me or my path, and not give up. I have resilience in that way I guess. I mean – sure, I may sulk for a bit, feel disappointed, cry, want to give up, but I eventually get to it, because there is just no other way. Plus, music is what helps me make sense of the world and my life. I need to do music, and so I keep going, despite the setbacks, or rejections or harsh words.



*Kristin Berardi: music is what helps me make sense of the world and my life...*  
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN COURTESY LOUDMOUTH

I realised at 15 that I had major problems with my voice – I was singing and speaking incorrectly, and it resulted in the start of nodules on my vocal folds. Treatment in those days was to be silent for two weeks, then start speech therapy and voice lessons. I learnt that I was fine not talking, but I went to sing, so often. I realised this was what I longed to do. This was how I expressed best; where I was safe and strong. So, from this difficult time, came my fire to keep working hard, to keep

growing my musical skills and experiences because I knew what my world would be like without it, and I didn't, and don't, want to take it for granted.

My mental health has been an ongoing thing for me to manage. I have been a sensitive person since I was a kid, I notice things around me, worry how things may be affecting others, and feel things deeply. All I know is that my sensitivity is what makes me me, and so in order to be me, I need to not shut that part down, but just accept and protect it, and keep it in check. It is what has gifted me more empathy, but it can also bring me to the brink. The brink is scary and lonely. Hopelessness lives there. In remaining, I am learning that my feelings are not always to be trusted, and although they are so intense, sometimes I just have to sit within them long enough, and they will pass.

I feel blessed that I can actually do something with the happenings of my life – the joys and the pain – that I have art to put it into. Whether it is in a story, or whether it is just in my sound, I am grateful that I can use what I'm feeling, noticing or experiencing into my music.



*Berardi: whether it is in a story, or whether it is just in my sound, I am grateful that I can use what I'm feeling, noticing or experiencing into my music...*

*PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

**If you could wave the magic wand over your music making, what would you wish for?**

That I would play to many people one day, like the big jazzy festivals and therefore more humans. But really – mostly – just that people felt safe to let go for that hour, that moment, that song. That they could be free and touched by what they heard.



**If you weren't a musician what would you do?**

I would be a photographer.

**Who or what are you listening to at the moment?**

Gabriel Kahane, especially *The Book of Travelers*, Shai Maestro, James Taylor.



**What are your other interests?**

Being kind. Trying to be an honest parent, and a good example for my kids (gahhhh). That's what came to my mind first, but regular interests outside of music, which is I think what you are asking, are nature, photography, colours and travel.

**Where and what do you see yourself doing in ten years time?**

Hopefully doing more gigs than at present; living in New York City would also be sweet. Yes please.

**Thanks very much for your time!**

Thanks for asking me Chris.

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**VIEW AND LISTEN**

**Kristin Berardi website:** <http://www.kristinberardi.com>