

ALL THAT JAZZ

New Orleans singer Linnzi Zaorski's "accidental" career

BY MEGAN HILL PHOTO BY ROMERO & ROMERO



In addition to singing and songwriting, she and her partner Nick Usner operate an organic farm called Grow. They sell heirloom and specialty produce along with culinary herbs to restaurants in New Orleans and at the Covington Farmers Market on Saturdays.

Jazz singer Linnzi Zaorski was bartending at Molly's At The Market on Decatur Street in New Orleans when she chanced upon a singing career. Though she never trained as a singer, Zaorski got her big break at the bar next door, The Abbey.

"My friend brought me to this little hole-in-the-wall place, and I just fell in love with this band that was playing," she says. She chatted with the band members and requested the song "Dream a Little Dream." Before she knew it, they were asking her to come up and sing it with them. "I said, 'I don't know, I don't really sing.' But I had enough cocktails to be persuaded to get up there and do it."

Zaorski admits she barely knew the words and was too scared to face the audience – even though she says hardly anyone was in the audience that night.

"But the feeling I got from playing with those guys and the response that I got from hearing the little bit that I knew of the song, I was just hooked," Zaorski says. She went back to sing with the band night after night, and eventually they signed on to back Zaorski regularly, forming The New Orleans Jazz Vipers.

The group started performing at The Spotted Cat on Frenchmen

Street, and soon Zaorski had herself a new career. That was in 2001; today, Zaorski has released five albums, with a sixth in the works for release later this year. The forthcoming album features plenty of her original songwriting, and even back-up from the Pfister Sisters. "It was such a treat to have them there and get to see them do something and have them working on something that is my recording. Really cool," she says.

Zaorski also has a regular weekly gig at Three Muses, – impressive considering she never set out for a singing career. "I'm definitely an accidental singer," she says. No one in her family sings, and though she always enjoyed it, "I assumed I didn't have a good voice."

But Zaorski's voice has a vintage quality to it, reminiscent of Judy Garland. It's something that comes naturally rather than being affected, which works well for her jazz and swing leanings. ♦

SO WHAT'S NEXT FOR ZAORSKI?

While she admits she's exchanging performances for time with her daughter lately, she'll probably ramp back up with more bookings later this year. And there's likely to be more songwriting in her future, too.

"It's one of those times in my life that I'm more inspired than usual," she says, hinting of Clementine. "I'm excited to move in a bit of a different direction now that my life has evolved, and there's a lot more in the repertoire to put on a recording."