

# P A M E L A R O S E

## *Biography*

With the dazzling array of tunes on her fifth album *Wild Women of Song*—all by women songwriters—the veteran San Francisco jazz and blues vocalist **Pamela Rose** makes a compelling case for the enduring contributions of women to America’s treasure trove of popular music. The new CD’s sly, affectionate subtitle, *Great Gal Composers of the Jazz Era*, describes Rose’s musical mission in no uncertain terms.

Boasting a rich, bold voice and blues-infused sensibility, **Pamela Rose** brings vast musical experience to an emotionally dynamic program of 15 songs by 14 women. Working with Grammy Award–winning producer **Leslie Ann Jones**, a studio legend who has crafted classic albums by vocal masters such as Rosemary Clooney, Dianne Reeves, Dee Dee Bridgewater, and Carmen McRae, Rose emerges as a major-league talent with an uncanny gift for putting a personal stamp on familiar standards, sturdy blues, and obscure ballads from the American Songbook’s back pages.

“The seeds were really planted on my last record, *Just for a Thrill*, when I recorded a few pieces by women songwriters, such as **Lil Armstrong**’s ‘Just for a Thrill,’” Rose says, referring to Louis Armstrong’s first wife, a respected pianist in her own right. “I started getting interested in her history as one of the first jazz pianists anywhere. As I performed these tunes by women, who were mostly unrecognized, I found that people truly responded to the repertoire. I was stunned we didn’t know these writers’ names. **Dorothy Fields** should be as familiar a name to us as Ira Gershwin or Johnny Mercer.”

No female-centric songwriting project could be complete without the work of Fields, a superlative lyricist with more than a dozen beloved standards to her credit. Rose makes the most of **Matt Catingub**’s jaunty, erotically charged arrangement of “**A Fine Romance**,” and swings her way through a lithe, finger-popping rendition of “**I’m in the Mood for Love**.” But she’s just as likely to deliver revelatory interpretations of lesser-known gems like Kay Swift’s “**Can’t We Be Friends?**” and Dana Suesse’s “**My Silent Love**.”

Most impressive is Rose’s stylistic range. She’s the rare singer who’s as comfortable belting sassy golden age blues like Alberta Hunter’s “**Down Hearted Blues**”, swinging hard on Doris Fisher’s “That Ole Devil Called Love” or singing with a divine tenderness on Maria Grever’s “What a Difference a Day Made.” Completing the package, Rose displays her considerable skills as a songwriter, contributing three beautifully crafted originals.

The Leslie Ann Jones touch is evident throughout *Wild Women of Song*. The sound is close and intimate, and each tune features a cast of players ideally suited for the mood intended. As the CD’s producer, she collaborated on every aspect of the project, from tracking down hard-to-find sheet music from Michael Feinstein and Peter Mintun to engaging some of the scene’s most capable players, such as the versatile **Matt Catingub**, trumpeter **Mike Olmos**, and **Jon Evans**

(Tori Amos's bassist). Rose, the album's executive producer, called on some of her favorite women musicians—drummer **Allison Miller**, **Mimi Fox**, bassist **Ruth Davies**, and pianist **Tammy Hall**.

“Working with Leslie has been an entirely wonderful experience,” Rose says. “Part of it is of course her extraordinary ears, and being able to track at Skywalker Sound, where she's the Director of Music Recording and Scoring. She's also someone who really loves vocalists, understands the technical and emotional aspects of a singer's job, and that's a rare gift.”

Born (June 28, 1956) and raised in Los Angeles, Rose was drawn to music at a young age. She grew up a block from the Troubadour, the West Hollywood nightclub that became a Mecca for the Southland's emerging singer-songwriter scene in the early 1970s. At the time the club allowed underage patrons, and Rose soaked up the music firsthand. “I just about lived there and witnessed this wonderful explosion when all the singer-songwriters were blooming,” Rose says. “I played guitar and tinkered on piano, writing my very emo songs that I sang at the Troubadour on amateur nights. The writing process has always fascinated and engaged me.”

Captivated by classic blues singers like **Bessie Smith** and **Ida Cox**, Rose helped put herself through U.C. Berkeley by belting out blues as a singing waitress. By the time she graduated with a degree in 19th-century literature, music didn't seem like much of a career option; at least until Hammond B3 organist **Merl Saunders** recruited her for an East Coast tour in 1977. With a passionate following from his work with Jerry Garcia, Saunders attracted avid audiences that he satisfied with an eclectic book encompassing blues, rock, funk, and soul.

“Merl got me to understand that the key to music is the groove,” Rose says. “He taught me so much about improvising and using the band as your instrument. And he really instilled the concept that the stage is sacred ground, you have to deliver it every night no matter how many people are in the audience. Another enduring influence has been the Hammond B-3 organ. I love the sound and it suits my voice. I like the soulfulness and power behind me.”

It was quite some time, however, before Rose found her way to jazz. After a run with rock guitarist Chris Cobb in the Eights she launched the new wave dance band Wild Kingdom, one of the most popular Bay Area acts of the early 1980s. Around the same time, she created an R&B revue called “When a Man Loves a Woman” with vocalist **Glenn Walters** (of Hoodoo Rhythm Devils fame), with whom she still performs occasionally. She was a sought after jingle session singer as well, with many national ads to her credit (Taco Bell, Supercuts, Levi's, California Raisin Advisory Board). But Rose probably gained her widest early exposure in the second incarnation of the **ZaSu Pitts Memorial Orchestra**, a talent-laden Motown-inspired ensemble that featured ace musicians like percussionist **Karl Perazzo** and vocalist **Linda Tillery**.

Life changes off the bandstand gradually filtered into her music, and Rose found herself moving away from pop and R&B, instead drawn toward jazz's wider dynamics and probing emotional themes. After getting married and having her first child, she started exploring the American Songbook standards that she'd heard her mother sing while growing up. (Rose and her husband, *San Francisco* Magazine publisher Steven Dinkelspiel, have two children: Emma, now 20, and Eli, 13.)

Working with pianist Nate Ginsberg, she turned her songwriting efforts toward a Swing Era sound and quickly gained recognition with her 1993 album *On the Jazzy Side of Blue*, which was nominated for two BMMIE Awards. Her follow-up, *Every Time I'm With You*, gained lavish critical praise and led to several European tours.

“I’d always loved the classic American songs, and had a hankering to leave big rock shows and go after something a little more personal,” Rose says. “I went after my heart and threw myself into the much more musically demanding jazz scene.”

Her jazz education was facilitated by a disparate group of mentors, including the late, esteemed drummer **Scott Morris**, ace guitarist **Mimi Fox**, inventive singer **Kitty Margolis**, and soulful saxophonist **Charles McNeal**. As Rose delved deeper into jazz, her love of the B3 organ resurfaced, and she found an ideal foil in Hammond veterans **Wayne De La Cruz** and **Tony Stead**, a soul-drenched player best known for his work with the Gospel Hummingbirds and Sly Stone. The collaboration resulted in 2001’s stellar soul-jazz session *You Could Have It All*, which attracted national attention, including a profile on NPR’s All Things Considered that praised the expressive power of Rose’s voice and her commitment to writing original material.

“What I’ve always loved is the most soulful side of jazz, when the element of blues is right there on the surface,” she says. “I love **Ray Charles**, early **Lou Rawls**, and **Sarah Vaughan** when she gets down. They provide endless inspiration, and I keep developing my own approach around those concepts.”

Rose’s concept crystallized beautifully in 2006 with her fourth CD, *Just for a Thrill*, an album that balances simmering romance with bluesy sass. The project also launched her musical partnership with savvy guitarist **Danny Caron**, who spent years as music director for blues legend Charles Brown. He co-produced the album and teamed up with her on several tunes, a songwriting collaboration that continues on *Wild Women of Song*. Many of the players featured on *Just for a Thrill*, such as pianist **John R. Burr**, drummer **Jason Lewis**, and organist **Wayne De La Cruz**, also make important contributions on the new album.

But *Wild Women of Song* is a quantum leap for Rose, an album that boldly sets her apart from the upper echelon of jazz/blues singers. More than an album, *Wild Women of Song* is an ongoing project that includes a web site with Rose’s incisive profiles of the songwriters whose tunes she interprets. “I’m hoping people looking for information on these songwriters will find their way to the music,” Rose says. “I hope these names become more familiar.” With the release of *Wild Women of Song*, Pamela Rose is assuring that her name will be familiar to anyone who appreciates well-crafted songs delivered with soul. !

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## **Pamela Rose:**

### ***Wild Women of Song—Great Gal Composers of the Jazz Era***

(Three Handed Records)

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[www.pamelarose.com](http://www.pamelarose.com) / [www.wildwomenofsong.com](http://www.wildwomenofsong.com)

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