

Saturday, September 29, 2007, 8pm
Wheeler Auditorium

Patricia Barber Ensemble



Patricia Barber *piano, vocals*
Neal Alger *guitar*
Michael Arnopol *bass*
Eric Montzka *drums*

Cal Performances' 2007–2008 Season is sponsored by Wells Fargo Bank.

About the Artist

Patricia Barber

Chicago-based vocalist, songwriter and pianist Patricia Barber has earned a reputation as a fiercely independent artist who has paid enough dues to call the creative shots on the kind of albums she wants to make. Thus far, her recording intuition has been impeccable, winning over local fans as well as establishing for her a strong support base internationally.

Ms. Barber has been in the vanguard of the new school of female jazz vocalists, who in the past decade have been exploring intriguing improvisational terrain beyond classic balladry and bop-infused standards. She was born in a suburb of Chicago to a saxophone-playing father, Floyd “Shim” Barber, who had played with Glenn Miller. After studying classical piano and psychology at the University of Iowa, Ms. Barber moved back to Chicago to play jazz, and in 1984 landed the gig that launched her career, playing five nights a week at the famed Gold Star Sardine Bar. Before long, there were lines outside the door on weekends. Her following grew larger and more devoted when, in 1994, she moved her base of operations to the Green Mill, the North Side club that is the nerve center of the indigenous Chicago jazz scene.

Ms. Barber’s major-label recording debut came in 1992 with *A Distortion of Love*, on Antilles. But for many in her current audience, it all began with *Café Blue*, released by Premonition in 1994. *Café Blue* led to Ms. Barber winning the “Female Vocalist/Talent Deserving Wider Recognition” category in the 1995 *Down Beat* International Critics Poll, an honor that she has since consistently claimed. Ms. Barber’s other recordings include her debut, *Split* (1989), which was re-released by Koch in 1997; *Modern Cool* (1998), the six-track EP *Companion* (1999), *Nightclub* (2000) and *Verse* (2002) on Premonition; and *Live: A Fortnight in France* (2004) on Blue Note.

In 2003, Patricia Barber became one of the few jazz musicians ever to be awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and she took the opportunity to create one of the most ambitious and affecting works of her career. Embarking on a bold, exciting musical adventure, Ms. Barber brought her compositional sophistication to new heights with *Mythologies*, a song-cycle based on Greek mythology, in which each of the 11 mythological characters in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is fleshed out in music.

“I didn’t necessarily expect to get the fellowship but then when I did I was thrilled. Actually this is the first grant in my life that I ever applied for.” Ms. Barber received a year-long grant to study, compose and create a book of songs. “I forced myself to study as much as I actually wrote. I had always studied songwriters like Cole Porter and Rogers and Hart. I used the fellowship time to study the great poets and the great classical composers, especially Chopin, some Verdi. And Schubert! His meter. His song. I would play them on the piano and I have notebooks charting the harmonies. Sometimes you’ll hear in opera how a melodic line can float over a harmony—justify an unusual harmonic change. That was definitely something I learned during this year that was really a great lesson for me, very different from a Cole Porter kind of a song.”

Mythologies is the product of a varied and flexible songwriting approach. In fact, as Ms. Barber recalls, “it’s different for every song—sometimes the words came first. Sometimes the melody line was first.” She looks back on the process as beneficial. “It’s made me a much better musician, a better songwriter. It is exciting to have tools to enrich what I already know about jazz and popular songwriting.”

A CD recording of *Mythologies* was released by Blue Note in 2006.