

Linda Marks

Linda Marks has been consumed by music ever since she can remember. From her childhood memories of tapping on her grandmother's Chickering baby grand, to saving enough money to buy her own piano as a teenager, Linda Marks has proven to be driven in her pursuit to make music on her terms. With an impressive ten full-length albums released within the last decade to her credit, Marks shows no signs of slowing down. I was able to pin Linda down for a one-on-one phone conversation on a cold February afternoon and her enthusiasm for music reverberated powerfully through the phone line. This is her story (so far)...

METRANOME: How long have you been singing and playing piano?

Linda Marks: It's funny... when I was a little kid, my first word was piano. I was magnetically attracted to pianos, but I didn't have one when I was a kid. Anywhere I went, if there was a piano, I would walk up and play it. My paternal grandmother had one. When I went to her house as a grammar school kid, I would sit there and write music and play the piano. I wrote a song called "The Piano," and my 2020 release was called The Piano. It has a lot of autobiographical songs. The song "The Piano" is about a little girl and her quest to get a piano.

I bought my own piano when I was thirteen years old with money I saved myself. My father used to say, "Music is a waste of a good mind." My greatest passion from the minute I arrived on the planet was music, so it was incredibly soul crushing to hear that.

METRANOME: Were you able to play the piano while in grammar school?

One of my grammar school friends had a piano. She was a little entrepreneur. She would actually charge me a dollar or two to play her piano. I would get the money and walk to her house and play the piano. When I was thirteen, I finally saved up enough money to buy one.

METRANOME: Where did you buy it?

When I was a kid, there were Roadrunner and Wile E. Coyote cartoons. Anytime Wile E. needed to get something, he got it from Acme. When I was thirteen, I went in to the Yellow pages and there was an Acme piano company. If it was good enough for Wile E. Coyote, it was good enough for me (laughs).

METRANOME: How did they deliver it?

They delivered it by a piano mover.

METRANOME: What did mom and dad say about that when they knocked on the door?

I told my parents that I earned money and

saved it and found a piano. I needed to get driven to the store so I could buy it. Then I asked, Where can we put it? My parents said I could put it on the 2-1/2 season porch that wasn't well insulated. It was freezing in the Winter and late Fall. That's where it was, but then my parents allowed it in the house once I had gone that far. When they realized their thirteen year old kid had saved hundreds of dollars for a piano, at that point they said, "Okay." I wasn't allowed to play

METRANOME: I understand you went to Yale and got a degree in music. Can you tell us about that?

When I went to Yale, I co-founded Something Extra, a 3rd women's a cappella singing group as a seventeen year old freshman. The group is still there. There was a piano in the common room of my residential college and every night I would play that piano. Even when I was in grad school at MIT, the faculty club had a piano.



it though when people were home. It was quite a journey for me to accept the truth of my fundamental passion.

METRANOME: When did you start writing and performing music?

My first performed piece was when I graduated from grammar school in the eighth grade. I wrote the eighth grade graduation song. I played the song and sang the lead and the entire eighth grade graduating class sang the chorus. That was my first publicly performed composition.

What did I do every time I had a moment? I went and played.

METRANOME: You mentioned that your paternal grandmother had a piano. Was she proficient at it?

She was an opera singer. She lived in Providence, Rhode Island, but before she had my father, she had been a professional opera singer. It's weird that my paternal grandmother was an opera singer and owned a piano, yet my father was terrified that I would starve if I pursued music. His own

mother had been a musician.

METRANOME: Did she do well as an opera singer?

She had certainly gotten parts. There were press clippings of her singing in different operas. I don't know how well she did financially though. It's like anything else, you can win awards and gain accolades, but can you pay the bills?

METRANOME: Were you ever deterred from not pursuing music?

It was very hard, I did it despite all the internal wounding from my family. I went to Yale and graduated with honors and distinction with a degree in music. I was a music major in spite of the fact that I was self trained. I was not a privileged kid that got to study with so and so. I taught myself guitar and then taught myself piano on the guitar. I still play guitar like a thirteen year old because that's how long it's been since I've played one (laughs).

METRANOME: Did you get a scholarship to go to Yale?

When I went to Yale, I was the poor middle-class kid that had to work to be there. Despite that, I still got really good grades. I was a songwriter. Most people at Yale were not songwriters, they were classical, but I was not classical. There were always obstacles to overcome.

METRANOME: When did you release your first record?

I cut my first album when I was in my twenties in the mid-1980s and collaborated with another songwriter Lisa Wexler for three years. I was on all the radio stations. Ron Della Chiesa had a radio show called "Music America," and he would have me on. In those days, they actually had acoustic pianos in the studios. Today they don't.

Everything was going really well, but I had a lot weighing on me. I had a son and became a single mom when he was two. I never anticipated on that happening. To support him and me, I couldn't be a full time musician. Then my mom got Alzheimer's, so I cared for her.

There's a song on The Piano about my mom called, "The Gardener," which is all about her Alzheimer's journey and the one thing that stayed with her even as she was getting worse, which was gardening. That was who she was. She was a gardener.

METRANOME: When did you get back to the music?

When my son was twelve, I had to get back and be involved as a songwriter again. In 2008, I would go and sing at The Acton Jazz Cafe at the jazz jams. At the end of my

mother's life in 2013, I made the commitment to do music again. I couldn't hold back anymore. She died in 2014 and my first new album came out in the beginning of 2015. I had been writing it since 2013.

I've produced ten studio albums since then. Two came out in 2021, two came out in 2020 and two came out in 2017. Some years I only released one. I'm releasing two albums this year [2022] as well.

METRONOME: I understand you've been writing songs with Mike Greenly. How did that come about?

I have a few songs that I'm trying to produce well enough that they could potentially earn a Grammy. I wrote a song with Mike Greenly who's a wonderful songwriter from New York, called "Let There Be Love."

We're currently working with Erik Balkey from Hudson Harding Music. He and Bill Coyle are the promoters for the Folk DJ Global Community. Mike and I are having Erik along with Grammy award winning sound engineer Glenn Barratt (from Philly) work on "Let There Be Love. I'm just trying to get myself out there. You honestly never know who's going to hear what when, and when it's going to matter.

METRONOME: What inspired the writing for your new album, Home.?

The title song, "Home" is all about, What is home? What has it been? What will it become? We all had to shelter at home because of the pandemic and our lives all

became home based.

Because of the pandemic, I've been doing a weekly live stream. This weekend will be one hundred weeks of my weekly live stream. People from all over the world have listened and I've made new friends through it. It's quite amazing.

METRONOME: Was there a defining moment that made you decide to write something about the pandemic and home?

I started meditating on it, What is home and what's it going to be. Just like the album's cover. I've always been a photographer, so I walk around and look for beauty. The cover picture is of a house in my neighborhood. That day was particularly beautiful. The colors were just right. It was an image that was perfect for the album's title, Home. That's where it all began.

In terms of the songs, some of them were inspired by things that happened in the world like "Nightmare In The Capitol," the riot at the nation's capitol. I seriously questioned, What is that doing to our children? What are they going to think of it?

Then, when Ruth Bader Ginsburg died, I wrote a song called "Marty and Ruth." It was a love story about their relationship and their lives. They had an amazing life together.

METRONOME: What inspired the writing of "Be The Light?"

Amanda Gorman wrote a powerful inaugural speech and said, "Instead of just

seeing the light, why don't we be the light?" When she said that, something struck me, so I wrote "Be The Light." My vision (when it's safe), is to do a video with lots of people of all ages, sizes, backgrounds and colors singing the song together.

METRONOME: You focus on relationships in some of your songs. Can you elaborate on that?

There are a few songs that are about the different shades of relationships. "In The Distance" is about meeting my partner in August of 2020. That song tells that story and includes lyrics that he wrote for the song.

Another song called, "Finally Room For Me," is inspired by a woman who left an alcoholic marriage and felt liberated. The relationship songs come from a lot of different angles.

METRONOME: What is "Shadows On The Ground" about?

I walk a lot and "Shadows On The Ground" is from me literally walking through the seasons. Meanwhile, "Winter Sounds" is a funny song where basically I love three of the seasons, but hate winter. I just had to write about it.

METRONOME: "I See You" was one of the few songs that you didn't pen for the album. Why did you include it?

"I See You" was co-written by G. Maloy Smith and Mike Greenly. That was the song led me to meeting Mike. I've always loved it, so I added to the album.

METRONOME: "Jazzin'" was one of the best tracks on the record. How did that come together?

A lot of people love that song. It's a jazzy, Latin kind of number that you do vocally from the jazz tradition. Instead of having lyrics, you're making sounds vocally. Some people call it "scat" singing.

METRONOME: Who else played on it?

Dave Birkin plays saxophone, Bo Winiker is on flugelhorn, Craig Akin, who is a phenomenal bass player out of New Jersey, is on bass and Joe Sabourin is on jazz guitar. It's a song that people love because it makes them want to get up and tap their feet.

METRONOME: What vehicle did you use to present your songs to the other musicians who played on the album?

I always go in to the studio and make a reference track with piano and vocals. Then I have Doug Hammer make a chart. He's produced all ten of my albums. He's a brilliant musician and a wonderful human being. He does all my charts.

METRONOME: Has Home been getting any airplay?

Yes. What's cool about this album is that it charted for the month of January on the Global DJ Charts, and I just learned that it charted at #18 on the Folk Chart curated by the Folk Alliance International. I am in great company! For that I'm very grateful.

-- Brian M. Owens

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