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# Faye Carol, soul prophet honored in Berkeley

By Andrew Gilbert | March 14, 2018 | Updated: March 16, 2018 10:04am

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Photo: Kito Kamili

Musicians, like prophets, often go without honor in their own lands, and the Dynamic Miss **Faye Carol** hasn't spent her time worrying about awards. But when Berkeley, her longtime hometown, declared March 13 "Faye Carol Day" in tribute to her decades of work as an "ambassador of black music," the singer came out in her Sunday best.

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Flanked by her pianist Joe Warner, photographer James Knox and saxophonist Howard Wiley, she was clearly delighted as she accepted the honor.

"I don't think it's sunk in because I've been so busy with day-to-day, night-to-night life," she said Tuesday. "When I'm someplace in public and someone comes up with hearty congratulations, I think this is something real and sweet and wonderful. It's nice to know someone is paying attention to all the years of toil, as well as the triumphs."

Steeped in jazz, blues and R&B, Carol turns every performance into a triumph, whether she's joining percussion maestro John Santos at SFJazz, stealing the show at last year's UnderCover Presents: A Tribute to "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill," or holding down a Sunday residency with Warner at the Back Room in Berkeley.

The next chance to catch Carol is Saturday, March 17, at another hometown gig when

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she and Warner are scheduled to perform as part of Ashkenaz's Maestras series on a soul-drenched double bill with vocalist Linda Tillery with pianist Tammy Hall (Carol presents an Ashkenaz workshop at 4 p.m. Sunday, March 18, on the various grooves and regional traditions encompassed by the blues).

She and Warner also return to San Jose's Cafe Stritch on March 24 for a monthly engagement, and hit Geoffrey's Inner Circle in Oakland on April 8 for an early performance followed by a jam session. And they restart their Sunday Back Room residency in June.



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One reason Carol's name hasn't traveled farther beyond the Bay Area is that she's severely under-documented as a recording artist. She's got four releases available via her website, [www.fayecarol.com](http://www.fayecarol.com), including 2014's "Faye Sings Lady Day 2," a live session recorded at Yoshi's. Some of her finest work has come on projects by other artists, particularly bassist/composer Marcus Shelby, who made her voice a central component on 2007's double album "Harriet Tubman" and 2010's civil rights epic "Soul of the Movement."

Like a number of leading musicians on the Bay Area scene, Shelby credits Carol with shaping his identity as a player and bandleader. Wiley, who started playing with Carol as a gifted and headstrong 16-year-old, describes the experience as trial by fire, as in, “You’re fired.”

“I’d get cussed out and fired, and then come back and get cussed out again,” he said.

Born in Meridian, Miss., Carol moved to Pittsburg with her family as a child and discovered her love of singing in the youth choir of Solomon Temple Missionary Baptist Church. By the end of high school, she was performing regularly in Pittsburg, playing the blues joints catering to soldiers from Camp Stoneman.

A talent contest victory at the Oakland Auditorium led to steady work with veteran East Bay bluesmen including Johnny Talbot, Eddie Foster and Johnny Heartsman. When musical tastes turned to disco in the mid-1970s, Carol reinvented herself as a San Francisco cabaret artist, drawing on a jazz education she received from a Pittsburg neighbor, pianist Martha Young (niece of tenor sax legend Lester Young).

While her late husband, Jim Gamble, was a respected music educator, Carol was very reluctant to take on the role of teacher. She credits pianist Ellen Hoffman with persuading her to join the faculty at Jazz Camp West.

Now she runs her own School of the Getdown, teaching classes in Berkeley and San Jose. But the bandstand is also her classroom, with every performance offering profound lessons in

music and life. Young musicians take note.

“I insist they get their suit cleaned. I listen to them and learn from them, and get their perspective,” she says. “And I insist they learn.”

Andrew Gilbert is a freelance writer.

**Maestras of Soul series presents Love in Duo: Faye Carol with Joe Warner, plus Linda Tillery and Tammy Hall:** 8 p.m. Saturday, March 17. \$30-\$35; Get Down on the Blues with Faye Carol workshop at 4-5:30 p.m. Sunday, March 18. \$20. Ashkenaz, 1317 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley. (510) 525-5054. [www.ashkenaz.com](http://www.ashkenaz.com)

Watch a clip about the Dynamic Faye Carol: [https://youtu.be/YD4tK\\_bzTcA](https://youtu.be/YD4tK_bzTcA)

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