

‘The Dynamic Miss’ Faye Carol celebrates Black history, with friends

More than a few jazz luminaries will join the iconic Bay Area singer onstage at Geoffrey’s Inner Circle during a run of shows in February.

by **Andrew Gilbert**
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The Dynamic Miss Faye Carol will headline a series of shows in February at Geoffrey’s Inner Circle in downtown Oakland. Credit: Curtis Jermany



Faye Carol knows there’s no respite from the storm, but singing has always provided a safe harbor amidst even the fiercest tribulations.

An iconic figure on the Bay Area music scene whose career spans six decades and multiple musical idioms, she embodies a soul-steeped Black musical aesthetic that encompasses blues and R&B, jazz, and the [American Songbook](#).

Part of a dwindling generation, Carol has mourned the loss of two treasured peers in recent weeks, with the passing of Oakland soul great Freddie Hughes and Albany-reared jazz and blues diva Denise Perrier.



“I loved Fred, and I loved Denise Perrier,” Carol said. “I lost my sister on Halloween night. If music wasn’t my refuge I would be nuts. It’s been a hard time for everyone and I’m so looking forward to these projects coming up.”

The primary project is “Faye and the Folks,” an extraordinary series of Sunday evening concerts at Geoffrey’s Inner Circle that runs throughout February, with each show boasting out-of-town artists who could easily be playing Yoshi’s, the SFJAZZ Center, or Freight & Salvage.

The series kicks off Feb. 6 when Carol and her longtime accompanist, pianist Joe Warner, are joined by veteran bassist Essiet Essiet, and Los Angeles drummer Tony Austin, who's gained international renown for his work with saxophonist Kamasi Washington and the West Coast Get Down collective. The concert originally featured Kenny Garrett, but the powerhouse alto sax great had to cancel this week due to COVID-19. Stepping in is the supremely soulful alto and tenor saxophonist Rickey Woodard, a mainstay on the L.A. jazz scene known for his brawny, swaggering sound.

For her Feb. 13 Valentine's Day concert she's collaborating with Grammy Award-nominated Oakland vocal master Kenny Washington. The plan is for both singers to play a solo set and then join forces for a set of duets (accompanied by Warner, Essiet, and Austin). Like Carol, Washington is a singer with an enviable stylistic range.

"He can play anything and we'll just do a variety—hard bop, funk, blues, and some beautiful ballads," Carol said. "There are all kinds of duos in this music, all kinds of ways you can go."

"Faye and the Folks" is supported in part by the Oakland City Council and the city of Oakland's Cultural Funding Program, with additional support from the California Arts Council. The series picks up where Carol left off in March of 2020, when a similarly talent-packed program she produced, "Faye and the Fellas," got cut short by the COVID-19 lockdown after the first two performances.

"So for a year and a half I've been trying to get to people streaming and Zooming," Carol said. "We did a video talking about COVID and healing with a comedian and a poet, ['Lyrics, Laughs & Rhymes for COVID Times,'](#) and I got some of my feelings out about it."

"Faye and the Folks" continues Feb. 20 with an all-star sextet featuring Lafayette-reared trombone star Steve Turre, drum great Dennis Chambers, and Berkeley flutist and vocalist Elena Pinderhughes, who's toured recently with Common, Herbie Hancock, and trumpeter Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah. San Francisco trumpeter Bill Ortiz, who spent 16 years with Santana, Essiet, and Warner round out the band.

"I am such a lover of horns, starting from when I used to play with Johnny Talbot," Carol said, referring to the groundbreaking Oakland R&B bandleader. "When I was getting my entrance into jazz I was crazy about Horace Silver and his trumpet/tenor frontline."

The series closes Feb. 27 with a double bill featuring a rare solo set by gospel pedal steel guitarist and vocalist Robert Randolph, and a duo set by Carol and Warner (who's the latest in an illustrious line of artists she's mentored over the years, from piano star Benny Green to tenor saxophone master Howard Wiley).

Unlike the other artists featured in the series, Carol isn't looking to collaborate with Randolph as much as luxuriate in his soaring sound. When she first encountered his music with his Family Band several years ago "I thought he was so fresh and full of fire, so historic and contemporary," she said. "I didn't know much about Black people playing that steel guitar, and that called me to learn something. His music brings his community with him. We'll all be dealing with roots music, blues, and gospel."

"Faye and Folks" follows in the footsteps of Warner's California Jazz Conservatory September concert series "Give the Drummer Some," which showcased trap set masters Bernard "Pretty" Purdy, Oakland-raised Darrell Green, Lenny White, and Dennis Chambers ("That was where I first heard Dennis and I knew I had to play with him again," Carol said.)

She wanted to present her series at Geoffrey's, the only Black-owned establishment of its kind in the region. A welcoming supper club with a full bar and \$15 soul-food plates, the venue is an ideal location to bring some of Black music's most celebrated artists.

"It's a Black History Month program," Carol said. "I wanted to do a panoply of Black music. Generally, that's how I am anyway. You come to my show and it's pretty eclectic. I love so many different kinds of music and artists. I wanted to display a variety of music and interpretations. I'll be doing what I always do. They'll mostly come and play my book."

It's a book brimming with love and soul, and just the antidote for storm-tossed times and uncertain horizons.

"Faye and Friends," every Sunday in February, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Geoffrey's Inner Circle, 410 14th Street, Oakland, [purchase tickets](#)

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