

BETT BUTLER

JAZZ PIANIST/SINGER/SONGWRITER

Bett Butler grew up in a conventional suburban household, surrounded by her father's uber-eclectic record collection. She began playing piano at age three, attempting to imitate what she heard around her, from Ella Fitzgerald to Patsy Cline to Ernesto Lecuona to Prokofiev; and made her musical debut in a Mexico City nightclub a year later when a tolerant pianist allowed her to sit in with his trio. Confined to the house with asthma brought on by Houston's smoggy air, Butler fed her imagination with books and recordings and took up songwriting. She gravitated to the radio stations at the low end of the dial, where she first heard the voice of Billie Holiday, who changed her whole way of hearing music.



Her high-school and college years brought a wild assortment of musical gigs, from accompanying silent films to touring with tent revivals through the South. Before embracing a full-time career in music, she worked in Melodrama Theatre as a scriptwriter, composer, musical director, and actor. That experience, where audience heckling and improvisation were encouraged—

followed by thirteen years playing solo six nights a week in a rowdy Riverwalk roadhouse—fostered a fairly fearless approach to performance.



Along with her latest collection of standards, *American Sampler*, Butler has two critically-acclaimed albums of original music: *Short Stories*, which earned a “recommended” rating from *All Music Guide*; and *Myths & Fables*, winner of a performance grant from the Artist Foundation. Her song “When Love Has Left the Room” placed first in the Jazz category of the 2006 International Songwriting Competition out of over 10,000 entries worldwide. Recipient of the inaugural Fred Weiss Memorial Grant for Professional Development from the Texas Music Coalition and an inductee in the San Antonio Women's Hall of Fame, she was named a

Woman of Influence in the Arts by the *San Antonio Business Journal* and Artist of the Month by the City of San Antonio. Recent albums include *Boleros*, a fusion of traditional Latin American music and jazz with Trio Azul; and *A New World*, a world fusion project with her spouse, bassist/composer/producer Joël Dilley. With Dilley, she co-owns Mandala Music Production, a studio specializing in the creation of original music for licensing; and Dragon Lady Records, an independent co-op label. She plays jazz festivals and clubs and performs in a concert/lecture series with Dr. Herbert Keyser, author of *Geniuses of the American Musical Theatre: The Composers & Lyricists* (Hal Leonard).

Bett Butler shares with Dilley the philosophy that music is emotion, songs are stories, and musicians are storytellers. She sees each song as a story to be told, and she just tries not to get in the way.

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