

## Céline Iris & Eddie Henderson to perform at the Bop Stop

by Mike Telin



Every musician understands the important role that mentors play in their development as an artist.

When Cleveland-based jazz vocalist Céline Iris arrived at Oberlin, she said there was “an immediate connection” between her and the legendary trumpet player and faculty

member Eddie Henderson. And while the Seattle native graduated last May with degrees in biology and jazz voice, Iris and her mentor have continued to stay in touch.

“A couple of months ago I said, ‘Eddie, I’d really just love to make some music with you. I don’t care where it is — it could even be in your office.’ And he said, ‘Why don’t we just do a gig?’” Iris recalled during a telephone conversation. “That was amazing, and I thought, absolutely, I will make this happen.”

On Tuesday, March 22 at 8:00 pm at the Bop Stop, [Eddie Henderson](#) and Céline Iris will be joined by Greg Bandy (drums), Roger Friedman (piano), and Eli Naragon (bass) for an evening of fresh takes on classic jazz standards, as well as repertoire that gives a nod to both Henderson’s and Bandy’s impressive careers. The performance will also be livestreamed on the venue’s [Facebook page](#). Click [here](#) for tickets and more information.

Iris said that she’s excited to share the stage with such an all-star lineup of musicians. “I asked Eddie who he felt comfortable playing with, and he told me about Greg and Roger. So I reached out to them and they both said absolutely, we’d love to play with Eddie anytime. And Eli is a friend of mine. We had a little bit of overlap at Oberlin — he graduated before me — and we’ve stayed in touch. I’ve watched him grow as a bass player, and it’s great to see what he’s been doing these past few years.”

When asked about the setlist, Iris said that she didn't want to divulge too much, but there will be plenty of jazz standards. "The exciting part of it is that Eddie and I have picked tunes that we can play the heads together. So it will either be trumpet and voice in harmony or he'll be playing a counter-melody with me. But either way, we will be interacting with each other and I'm so excited for it."

The evening will also include tunes from Henderson's two recent albums, *Shuffle* and *Deal & Be Cool*, as well as some pieces that highlight Bandy's time with Pharoah Sanders. "There will also be some hard bop with music of Miles Davis and Freddie Hubbard. But honestly, the whole point of this concert is for all of us to get together and have fun making music."

Out of curiosity, I asked Iris if she was always attracted to vocal jazz. "That's a funny question because it's kind of a yes and no," she said. "I have always loved vocal jazz, but the thing that really got me interested in it was listening to the big bands of Cab Calloway, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and the vocal jazz that went with that music. So I have to thank vocal groups like the Andrews Sisters and the Mills Brothers for getting me into it."

Still, she may have been even more influenced by instrumental jazz. "I did a deep dive into guys like Coltrane and Miles — those cats were the ones who solidified it for me," she said, adding that she likes to emulate instruments with her voice.

"But I do listen to a lot of vocal jazz: Sarah Vaughan and Anita O'Day are probably my biggest influences. And Chet Baker as well — he has the twofer of the trumpet and voice. That's my long-winded answer to the question," she said laughing.

Turning our conversation to the topic of Oberlin, I mentioned that while the Conservatory has been offering a jazz studies major since the late 1980s, the vocal jazz degree is a very recent addition to the department. "I was in the first jazz vocal class. There were three of us — me, a transfer from the College, and an older student."

Iris said that she was fortunate to have La Tanya Hall as a voice teacher. "She is incredible. And if you want to talk about mentorship — La Tanya coached me in amazing ways, and helped me develop my voice, and my own sound, which is something that I think she is really gifted in: showing people the parts of themselves they can lean into and grow."

Now that her student days are over, Iris is happy to have a place like the Bop Stop, where she can continue to hone her craft. "It's the place where I've been gigging," she said. "And Gabe [Pollack] has done so much to make it a creative space for people

— the monthly jams have been instrumental in my growth as a musician. Being able to go there and meet people and have a space to be creative that is more than a gig — that’s been amazing. So a big shout-out to Gabe and to Anthony Taddeo, who has been the main organizer of the jams.”

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