



John Abbott

RENÉ MARIE

Experiment in Truth

Vocals **René Marie**
Acoustic Bass **Elias Bailey**
Piano **John Chin**
Drums **Quentin Baxter**

PROGRAM

There will be an intermission.

Saturday, February 16 @ 8 PM

Harold Prince Theatre

ABOUT THE ARTIST

René Marie

In two decades, 11 recordings and countless stage performances, vocalist René Marie has cemented her reputation as not only a singer but also a composer, arranger, theatrical performer and teacher. Guided and tempered by powerful life lessons, and rooted in jazz traditions laid down by Ella Fitzgerald, Dinah Washington and other leading ladies of past generations, she borrows various elements of folk, R&B and even classical and country to create a captivating hybrid style. Her body of work is musical, but it's more than just music. It's an exploration of the bright and dark corners of the human experience, and an affirmation of the power of the human spirit.

Marie was born in 1955 into a family of seven children in Warrenton, Virginia. While neither of her parents were formally trained musicians, radio and records of all kinds – blues, folk, bluegrass and classical – made up the soundtrack to her childhood. Marie had just one year of formal piano training at age nine, then another year of lessons at age 13 after her parents divorced and she moved with her mother to Roanoke, Virginia. During her teenage years, she sang in a few R&B bands at musical functions in her community. She composed and sang her first piece with a band when she was 15.

But Marie put her musical aspirations aside to make room for the obligations and responsibilities of adulthood. She married a former bandmate when she was 18, and by the mid-1990s, she was the mother of two and working in a bank. When she was 41, her older son convinced her to start singing again, and she took a few tenuous steps into her local music scene, singing for tips one night a week in a hotel bar. It would be several months before she actually earned any real money as a singer.

Her husband was initially supportive of her reboot to her musical career, but things changed by the end of 1997, when he issued an ultimatum: stop singing or leave their home. Tension over the issue escalated from emotional abuse to domestic violence, and she left the house and the marriage behind.

“Something happens when you get up on stage and start making music with someone,” Marie explains. “Another part of your personality comes to life. I had kind of pushed that down over the years, but because of the music, I was able to speak up and defend myself and be my own advocate. So when my husband gave me that ultimatum, it wasn't that I thought, ‘Oh my God, I have to sing.’ It was more like, ‘I don't think I want to live with anybody who thinks it's okay to issue an ultimatum like that.’”

Over the next 18 months, she made a series of profound course corrections that steered her back toward a full-time career in music. She left the bank job, moved to Richmond, Virginia, divorced her husband of 23 years, produced her first CD, signed onto the MaxJazz label and took the title role in the world premiere production of *Ella and Her Fella*, *Frank* at the Barksdale Theatre in Richmond.

Marie's self-produced CD, *Renaissance*, was released in 1999. In 2000, she signed onto the MaxJazz label and recorded four more albums over the next four years: *How Can I Keep from Singing?* (2000), *Vertigo* (2001), *Live at Jazz Standard* (2003) and *Serene Renegade* (2004). She parted ways with the label in 2005 as part of a strategy to take more control of her own career track. She moved to Denver, where she recorded and co-produced her sixth CD, *Experiment in Truth*, released in 2007. She also focused her musical and acting talents on a one-woman stage show, *Slut Energy Theory: U'Dean*, a play about overcoming abuse and incest. The play premiered in October 2009, and the soundtrack, released by the end of that same year, was the seventh installment in her discography.

Part of Marie's musical philosophy has been focused on giving back. In 2010, she launched a series of vocal therapy group sessions called SLAM. “I've never been to college or received any ‘professional’ training,” she said at the time, “so I feel a bit anxious about my ability to convey my personal approach to singing. However, I know what I know, and I've always been up for a good challenge.” And in a self-deprecating moment, she added: “Although the thought of attempting to share my vocal philosophy often makes me wonder if I have completely lost touch with reality.”

Marie joined the Motéma label with the 2011 release of *Voice of My Beautiful Country*, followed later that same year by *Black Lace Freudian Slip*. Her 2013 follow-up, *I Wanna Be Evil: With Love To Eartha Kitt*, earned a Grammy® nomination in the Best Jazz Vocals category.

The newest installment in her ever-expanding body of work is *Sound of Red*. Released April 2016 and her second Grammy®-nominated recording, *Sound of Red* is Marie's her first album of all-original material, an 11-song set that provides insightful glimpses into the many small but profound turning points that are part of an individual life. Her clever songcraft and sensual vocal delivery make those personal moments not only meaningful but enlightening to a broad audience.

"I wanted to make a record that people could go back to again and again to excavate their emotions," says Marie. "We cover things over every day. We have to in order to move through the day and move through our lives. We can't always afford to be vulnerable to things like pain, loss, confusion, hurt and frustration. I want this record to provide some kind of architecture to provide support in those moments when our emotions are not necessarily happy ones."

Perhaps more than most artists, Marie understands music's capacity to heal and inspire. Not only has she herself been the beneficiary of it, but she has made every effort along the way to extend those same benefits to others. "I have never forgotten the early lessons learned about the power of music," she says. "Today, I try to imbue that feeling of emotion into every song I write and every song I sing – every time. I am very happy to be alive today, doing the things I love to do – singing, composing, writing, teaching and arranging."



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