

# Jane Siberry

## Biography

More than twenty years after her first musical release, Jane Siberry has become renowned both for her hauntingly beautiful music and for her strength as a creative, innovative artist. With eleven major recordings, three poem books, her own independent label, and the acclaim of fans and peers alike, Siberry continues to redefine and challenge herself as one of contemporary music's most original creative voices.

Jane's refusal to follow fads, trends and fashions has been her signature from the earliest days of her musical career. Her preparation for launching her full-time career as a performing artist consisted of earning a BSc in microbiology at the University of Guelph. Rather than clashing with her artistic spirit, the scientific method infused Jane's work with a deeper understanding of the physical world and reflected her curiosity and appreciation for detail. Her unending desire to find and describe the essence of human experience has led her through numerous musical inventions in a multitude of forms; the unique outlook of scientist and musician shines through them all, earning her the passionate loyalty of music-lovers world-wide.

Jane released her eponymous first recording, financed by contributions from diners in Guelph restaurants, in 1981. She was signed to Canadian label Duke Street Records by 1984. The result, *No Borders Here*, produced her first 'hit'--'Mimi On The Beach'. A year later, *The Speckless Sky* went gold and Jane began to receive awards and international attention. In 1987, Jane signed with Warner/Reprise and produced the haunting and enigmatic albums *The Walking* and *Bound By The Beauty*. *Bound By The Beauty* is very likely the only recording on a major label to have been recorded in an apple orchard. Its acoustic simplicity, particularly after the heavy production values of her previous recordings, gave her listeners a hint of the independent path that Jane would follow on later recordings.

Her unique musical vision caught the ear of Brian Eno, who helped out with Jane's next project, *When I Was A Boy* (1993). On the strength of songs such as 'Sail Across The Water', 'Temple' and 'Calling All Angels' (a duet with k.d. lang), *When I Was A Boy* became Jane's biggest commercial success and garnered her worldwide acclaim. Director Wim Wenders used 'Calling All Angels' in his film *Until the End of the World*, and the song has since been used in a wide range of film and television shows, including *Pay It Forward* (2000), *Roswell*, *Six Feet Under* and *Deadwood*. Ever restless creatively, Jane's follow-up album *Maria* (1995) was a jazz-inspired recording that reflected Jane's interest in more 'present' improvisational music.

In 1996, Jane struck out and formed her own recording label, the Internet-based SHEEBA Records, in an effort to find a place where she could find creative freedom in all aspects of her work.

Through SHEEBA, she has been able to distribute not only her music but an ever-expanding repertoire of creative endeavours, including books, DVDs, sheet music, clothes, and 'all things Siberry'. She has also been able to make available projects like the Beauty Train DVD, which has been described as 'what if Jane Siberry had her own TV talk show?'

Jane's first release through SHEEBA was a collection of songs she had written in her teens. The appropriately-titled Teenager was followed by A Day In The Life NYC (1997), an experimental sound collage of voice mail, yoga classes, cab rides and studio recordings with artists including Joe Jackson, k.d. lang and Darol Anger. Then came the voluptuous New York Trilogy (1999), which was recorded at New York's famous Bottom Line Club. Based on three extraordinary theme concerts, the sessions produced Child--Music For The Christmas Season, Tree--Music For Films And Forests and Lips—Music For Saying It.

At the turn of the millennium, Jane reached into the past, coming forward with the lush Hush (2000), a collection of American and Celtic folk songs and spirituals. In 2001, Jane gathered collaborations with other artists such as Peter Gabriel, Hector Zazou, Sotoma Takafumi, Joe Jackson, Nigel Kennedy and even Barney the Purple Dinosaur, into the anthology City.

In 2002, Rhino Records produced Love Is Everything, an anthology and tribute to Jane's work, including the fourth installment of her 'Map Of The World' song series, subtitled 'Pilgrim'.

In 2003, she began work on what was to be another Christmas recording. The project soon developed a life of its own and emerged as a fresh interpretation of music from Handel, Bach, Mendelssohn, and other classical artists who have written spirituals linked to the Christmas season.

SHUSHAN the Palace (Hymns of Earth) is a gorgeous and virtuosa performance. To celebrate its release, Jane took a band of excellent musicians on an intense cross-continent concert tour in November and December 2003 that took them from New York City to Los Angeles, and from Vancouver to Toronto. SHUSHAN was met with critical praise as both a recording and live performance. "...the singer-songwriter gives the impression of being at the peak of her powers...applause, cheers and two standing ovations" (The Victoria Times Columnist); "SHUSHAN is easily the most beautiful album you will ever own" (Stylus, Winnipeg).

2004 saw Jane recording the title song for the new Care Bears movie and touring for most of the year through Canada and the United States. Her performances included appearances at the Montreal Jazz Festival, with highly respected pianist Tim Ray; a tribute concert for Neil Young curated by Hal Wilner in Brooklyn, NY; and an invitation to a literary festival in Madison, Wisconsin.

2005 has been a watershed year for Jane as she continues to be a pioneer in marketing her work as well as creating it. In June, Jane discontinued the production of all CDs and merchandise and launched 'The Log Cabin', an online MP3 store at her website [www.sheeba.ca](http://www.sheeba.ca). 'The Log Cabin' enables her fans to download Jane's entire musical catalogue (much of which was out of print) directly from the artist. More unusually, in addition to music, Siberry has made available her music

videos and talk show Beauty Train at high quality, and has plans to sell e-books as well in future. By moving from physical to electronic inventory (which requires no maintenance and you never run out of stock!), Jane will concentrate on her latest original recording, tentatively entitled Lily. This will be the first original recording Siberry has made since 1993's When I Was A Boy. Her leap to virtual inventory mirrors her strong steps towards devoting herself even more completely to being a pure artist. She will also move away from having a 'home', 'car' and anything she considers anti-'travelling light' to simply living where she works. Her response to 'where do you live?' will not be 'nowhere' but 'everywhere'.

Early in 2006, Siberry closed her Sheeba office, then auctioned and sold nearly all of her possessions via eBay — including her Toronto home and her musical instruments. She retained one travelling guitar, but none of the other instruments featured on her albums and in her concerts. In 2006, she told *The Globe and Mail* that she had kept a very few precious possessions, in storage.

*"I felt the need to make some strong changes in my life. It seemed important to change my name, so I did. I changed it to a name that I thought was simple, an empty cup. I had never heard the name Issa before, and it turns out to have some wonderful meanings, including a haiku poet in Japan, and the name that Jesus had in India. But two weeks ago I officially changed my name back to Jane Siberry. I felt with the name change, I had gotten in my own way, in terms of devoting myself to my career, making my work available to people. So, Jane Siberry is my name again until further notice, but I feel richer from having been Issa for three years."*

On June 3, 2006, somewhere in northwestern Europe, Siberry changed her name to **Issa**: revealing this change of identity to the public a couple of weeks later on June 24, 2006. She told *The Globe and Mail* that she chose the name Issa as a feminine variant of Isaiah. She stated that her older music would remain available for sale under the name "Jane Siberry", but her new material would be released as Issa. At the time she also stated, regarding the change of identity, "I had to do it right. I had to be serious about it and I had to convey that. When I put Jane away, I went silent for 24 hours. Not a word to anyone. And then Issa from that point on."

Later she would describe the process of choosing a new identity in terms of changing her writing approach - "Moving into Issa, I didn't know if I'd be in the music business any more. I just started writing. I wanted to let go of any expectations and just try to get closer to what I heard in my head... I just tried to write as precisely as I could to what I heard in my head. I slowed everything down and took one note at a time, and just waited until I heard the next note." The process was evidently successful, resulting in thirty-three songs written in thirty-three days.

On July 4, 2006, Issa gave a lecture at University of British Columbia in Vancouver on the topic of "Cracking the Egg: A Look from the Inside". She began with a poetic meditation on science and life, and then opened the floor up to questions from the audience. She talked about her recent adventures in decommmodifying her life, her change in name, and her new conception of herself as an artist. Over 2006 and 2007, she documented the process of recording some thirty new songs in her journal, posted on her MySpace page and on her website.

In autumn 2008 Issa finalized the ideas for a trilogy of albums to be called the "Three Queens" sequence. The first of these - *Dragon Dreams* - was the debut Issa release, on December 12, 2008. As with the previous Jane Siberry material, it was released on Sheeba: Issa had retained the label despite slimming down its operations.

In 2009, Issa released the second album in the "Three Queens" trilogy, *With What Shall I Keep Warm?* However, it was plain that her identity was no longer fixed, as both of the names she'd used as a musician - "Issa" and "Jane Siberry" - were included on the cover. In December 2009, she notified her fans that she had recently changed her name from Issa back to Jane Siberry, feeling that the process of working under a different name had run its course.

Inspired by the dichotomy between frequent e-mails from devoted international fans asking her to play a concert in their city and her difficulty in finding a suitable concert promoter, Siberry launched a "microtour" through her fan mailing list in 2010, in which she offered to play small venues — ranging from intimate cafés to fans' own homes — in any location in Europe where one or more fans could organize a space, an audience of about 20 to 30 people and a night of accommodation.<sup>[18]</sup>

In May 2010, Siberry made her entire back catalogue of music available as free downloads in MP3 and AIFF formats. She had previously employed a flexible pricing policy, stating "I started feeling weird about holding back anything people wanted because of the money. It just felt wrong to my stomach, so I made a flexible interface so people could take it with whatever reasoning they felt was right, and I didn't have to worry about it anymore."

In March 2011, Siberry advised her fans through her mailing list that the third album of the "Three Queens" trilogy was almost ready (having been "nearly completed" several times before), and that she intended to release a fourth disc as part of the collection. The album, *Meshach Dreams Back* was released later in 2011 and was the first album to be credited to "Jane Siberry" for eight years.