

## Deanna Witkowski- 500 word bio

Some musicians keep a foot in two or three worlds, bouncing between styles and traditions as called for by the situation or assignment. New York pianist/composer Deanna Witkowski simply invented her own verdant, borderless realm. Possessing a supple sense of swing, ravishing touch, and vast harmonic resources, she has created an utterly personal body of music informed by her deep knowledge of jazz, European classical and Brazilian forms. The winner of the 2002 Great American Jazz Piano Competition, Witkowski has released five critically hailed albums over the past fifteen years, with each new project revealing a steadily evolving sensibility marked by melodic invention and emotional connection. Marian McPartland invited her to appear as a guest on her popular public radio show *Piano Jazz*, and *JazzTimes* noted, “if Brad Mehldau and Bill Charlap represent the gold standard among contemporary pianists, then Deanna Witkowski deservedly ranks as their sterling sister.”

As a composer, Witkowski creates masterly works setting sacred texts to music and was selected for one of five coveted spots in 2015’s Composer-Librettist Studio at New Dramatists, a New York institution that supports playwrights in creating new works for the stage. But she’s spent most of the past two decades forging an urbane, pan-American sensibility that combines the irrepressible joy of Errol Garner with the probing intelligence and harmonic insight of Bill Evans.

An exploratory spirit animates Witkowski latest album, *Raindrop: Improvisations with Chopin* (Tilapia Records), a solo piano session that seamlessly combines jazz, Chopin, and the music of Brazil. In many ways, Witkowski’s creative identity is built on her gift for gracefully bringing together seemingly disparate elements. On her fourth album, 2009’s *From This Place*, she set ancient and modern sacred texts to jazz-steeped scores, exploring an array of formats from three-part women’s *a cappella* to an instrumental quartet. Whether working with the Mass or her own luminous lines, Witkowski displays a striking gift for wrestling with a text and expressing in her music the deep insights she’s gleaned.

She made her recording debut as a leader with 1998’s *Having to Ask* on her Tilapia Records label, an album focusing on her impressive original tunes that earned her accolades from *Jazz Journal International* as “one of the best of the new generation of jazz pianists.” Witkowski followed up

with 2003's *Wide Open Window*, a tremendously accomplished quartet session alternating her originals with standards, mostly by Cole Porter. Much of the music was inspired by her collaboration with powerhouse tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin, often creating gorgeous voicings by pairing his horn with her vocals.

Witkowski's third release, 2005's *Length of Days*, confirmed her status as one of jazz's elite artists. Introducing eight arresting originals, the quartet session once again pairs her piano and vocals with McCaslin's tenor and soprano saxophones. Bassist Dave Ambrosio and drummer Vince Cherico provide superlative rhythmic support throughout.

Rather than pulling her in different directions, all of Witkowski's interests have created a critical mass so that her musical passions feed and reinforce each other. She's planning a trip to Brazil to write a large-scale project, using regional rhythms to write pieces for patron saints. And she continues to set sacred texts to music, creating work in which communion with the ineffable is inseparable from communication on the bandstand.