

"Blackout" -- live in the studio during Michael Bourne's "Blues Break" on WBGO. Bourne described the CD as "a continuing stretch of her musical horizon. Edgier instrumentals. Charming vocals."

The concept for *Nothing Never Happens* was developed during her residency at Joe's Pub in New York. That venue, she said, "is one of my favorite places to both see and hear shows because it's not specific to one genre. Since this music is about processing without judgment, it was important to me to find a venue where I could let ideas come out away from pre-conceived notions of what it should sound like." Her upcoming concerts will "lean on the blues to ultimately share a message of humanity and optimism which I hope will help bring people together in these crazy times."

Another expansion of Skonberg's musical limits were performances on January 17 and 18 of what she calls "my first fully conceptualized symphony show with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. It was such a beautiful and big undertaking called 'Singin' The Blues - From Billie Holiday to Bob Dylan'. I would love to do it again."

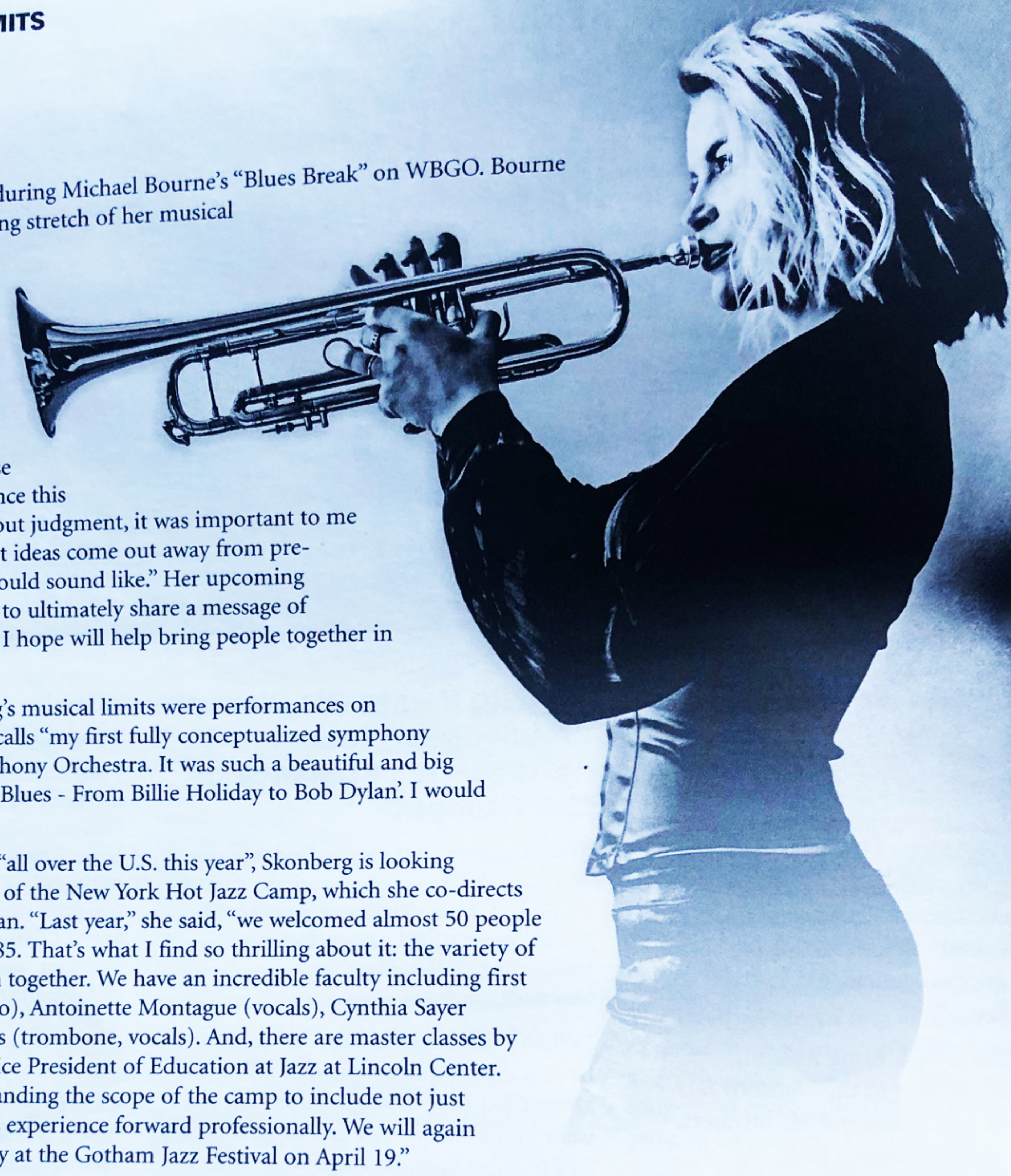
In addition to her concert tour "all over the U.S. this year", Skonberg is looking forward to the fifth anniversary of the New York Hot Jazz Camp, which she co-directs with guitarist/vocalist Molly Ryan. "Last year," she said, "we welcomed almost 50 people from five countries, aged 16 to 85. That's what I find so thrilling about it: the variety of people coming together to learn together. We have an incredible faculty including first timers Rossano Sportiello (piano), Antoinette Montague (vocals), Cynthia Sayer (banjo, vocals), and Ron Wilkins (trombone, vocals). And, there are master classes by Queen Esther and Todd Stoll, Vice President of Education at Jazz at Lincoln Center. It's important to us to keep expanding the scope of the camp to include not just how to play but how to take this experience forward professionally. We will again host a big final concert and party at the Gotham Jazz Festival on April 19."

Last spring, Skonberg performed at the Saturday night Town Hall performance of guitarist Stephane Wrembel's annual Django A Gogo Music Festival. This year, she will be part of one of the three performances in Maplewood, NJ, Wrembel's current home town. The concert, on Friday night, May 8, will be entitled "Django New Orleans" and will feature Skonberg on trumpet and vocals along with Wrembel and Russell Welsh on guitar, Aurora Nealand on reeds and vocals, David Langlois on washboard, Joe Correia on sousaphone, and Scott Kettner on drums.

"Stephane," she said, "is an amazing musical force! I love his playing and his energy with both his band mates and the audience." Skonberg and Wrembel tried out his concept of "Django New Orleans" for two nights last year at Joe's Pub. Then, "We rehearsed near his house in Maplewood. He loves Maplewood so much and hearing about the community that comes out for the final concerts of his camp made me want to be part of it even more."

In my "Editor's Choice" column in the November-December 2019 issue of *Jersey Jazz*, I mentioned Skonberg's willingness to take risks. I doubt that she will ever stop. As *AllAboutJazz's* Jerome Wilson said in his album review: Bria Skonberg, "has exploded out of the 'hot jazz' cage and become a mature, versatile musician who sings and plays with confidence in any style she wants . . ."

The HACPAC concert will be held at 8 p.m. on Saturday, April 18. Tickets can be ordered by logging onto hacpac.org or calling (201) 820-3007. Skonberg's Kimmel Center concert will be at 8 p.m. on Saturday, May 9, in the Center's Perelman Theater. Tickets can be ordered by logging onto kimmelcenter.org or calling (215) 893-1999.



NO LIMITS

Bria Skonberg: 'New Album Material, Some Tunes Anchored in Tradition, and Whatever Inspires Me That Week'

By Sanford Josephson

Trumpeter/vocalist Bria Skonberg made her first trip to New York (from British Columbia) in 2006 for an International Association for Jazz Education (IAJE) conference. "One of the most impactful moments," she recalled, "was a final concert where the Jon Faddis Orchestra was on stage facing the Count Basie Orchestra, trading tunes. I couldn't believe my ears. Eventually, there was a celebration of NEA Jazz Masters, and out came Slide Hampton, Nancy Wilson, Freddie Hubbard, Tony Bennett, Bob Brookmeyer and more; and my head just exploded."

One of Skonberg's friends on that trip was Seattle-based trombonist Emily Asher. "Emily and I both decided on that trip to move to New York City, which she did in 2008; and I followed two years later." Prior to the move, Skonberg had befriended trombonist Jim Fryer, whom she met on the West Coast. And, through that connection, she began visiting the New York-New Jersey area,

playing and singing with him at some local venues. Her first area performance, with Fryer, was in 2008 at the Morris Museum's Bickford Theatre in Morristown, a venue that "holds a very special place in my heart because of the warm reception."

On Saturday, April 18, Skonberg will be bringing her current quartet to the Hackensack Performing Arts Center, and on May 9, she will be appearing at the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia. In those early days at the Bickford, she and Fryer performed mostly traditional tunes -- jazz associated with Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke and Jelly Roll Morton and American Songbook standards by composers such as George Gershwin and Irving Berlin. Skonberg has not abandoned that music, but, adding songwriting to her skill set, she has branched out into some more adventurous musical directions, exemplified by her latest, self-produced album, *Nothing Never Happens*, released in November 2019.

At HACPAC and Kimmel, her musical selections will be, she said, "mostly new album material, some tunes anchored in tradition, and

"Stephane [Wrembel] is an amazing musical force! I love his playing and his energy with both his band mates and the audience."



whatever inspires me that week. I'm definitely looking forward to these shows. It will be my regular working quartet of Darrian Douglas (drums), Devin Starks (bass), and Chris Pattishall (piano), which is my favorite combination. So much of our sound comes from nuance, dynamics, and thoughtful details, so it's important that we're no longer reading the music, and just listening to each other."

While *Nothing Never Happens* might disappoint some of Skonberg's traditional-only enthusiasts, *AllAboutJazz's* Jerome Wilson called the album "the product of a more mature and polished musician . . . Skonberg's singing and playing carries a level of grit and emotion she has never shown before."

With Pattishall, Starks, Douglas, and guitarist Yasushi Nakamura, Skonberg recently performed two songs from *Nothing Never Happens* -- "So Is The Day" and

continued on page 10