

Alma Mičić

Serbia: jazz singer and pianist

Object: Shure SM58 microphone

*Џез ме је спасио пуно пута.
(Serbian)*

[Jazz saved my life many times.]

I first heard the tune “Summertime” on a music box when I lived in Belgrade. I learned that Sarah Vaughan sang it and looked for her record in a used record store. That is how I discovered Bird, Dizzy Gillespie, Clifford Brown, and Ella Fitzgerald with the Count Basie orchestra. I started singing along with instrumental and vocal jazz. I had piano lessons, but I didn’t know jazz chords, so my uncle Branko showed me. With all the political and economic strife in Belgrade, the jazz clubs became a mecca for people who wanted to get away from it all. The clubs were packed and became a staple of the city.

When a friend said I should apply for a scholarship from Berklee College of Music, I said, “Are you crazy? Among all the singers of the United States, where jazz is traditional, why would they want a Serbian girl from Belgrade to sing jazz?” To get the student visa, I had to come back three times to the U.S. Embassy. I think the Dayton Agreement had just been signed, but we still had political and economic sanctions, so a lot of people were trying to get out of the country, and there was a line at every embassy in the city. You couldn’t really get an American visa unless you had really good cause to be there. I had the letter from Berklee. I got the visa and arrived in January of 1996.

Uncle Branko gave me this microphone when I performed in 1992 at my first jazz festival when I was in high school. Since then I have been using it at performances where you have to bring our own mic. I have had it for twenty years, and it has been traveling with me everywhere.



Bio:

Alma Mičić was born and raised in Belgrade, Serbia. At the age of 16, she started performing with a local quartet. Soon she became a featured vocalist with the Radio Belgrade Big Band and appeared at many local jazz festivals as well as on television and radio broadcasts. In 1995, she received a scholarship to attend Berklee College of Music in Boston, graduating in 1999 with a Bachelors of Music degree in Jazz Performance. Since moving to New York City in 2000, Alma has released four albums: *Introducing Alma* (2004), *Hours* (2008), *Tonight* (2013), and *That Old Feeling* (2017). She has appeared at the Jazz Standard, Scullers, Iridium Jazz Club, Cecil’s Jazz Club, as well as festivals and concert halls in the U.S. and internationally. She has been featured in major music publications. She is a recipient of the Cleo Laine Award for Outstanding Musicianship and the BRIO Award from the Bronx Council on the Arts.