

THANA ALEXA

Surprising is the word that perhaps best describes Grammy® nominated and Downbeat cover artist, Thana Alexa, an extraordinarily creative force in music. An awe-inspiring vocalist, composer, arranger and producer – for whom the voice is both a lyrical and experimental instrument – her music pushes the boundaries of the genre into new and unexplored territory with deep seeded roots in jazz and overtones of contemporary soul and world music.

Regina Carter, violinist, recipient of the MacArthur “Genius” Award and Doris Duke Award says, “*Thana isn't afraid to take risks. Her vocal performances are powerful, vulnerable, joyful, spiritual and genuine. Her use of rhythm, textures and intricate harmonies is unique and at times, complex. Sometimes you think you know where she is going, then she SURPRISES you.*”

Her latest album, *ONA* (self-release, March 2020), which earned her **two Grammy® nominations** (Best Jazz Vocal Album and Best Instrumental Jazz Solo for Regina Carter’s performance), is Alexa’s focus, her mission statement. Translated to "SHE" from her family's native Croatian, *ONA* was inspired by the cross generational and cross-cultural stories of the immigrant women in her family and evolved into an exploration of the experiences of contemporary women everywhere. Its premise crystalized in 2017 after her attendance at the Women's March on Washington, D.C. after which she was inspired to learn more about the stories of the women in her own family and the influences that their life experiences have had on her own existence, growth and sense of freedom. The album speaks to us musically about every facet of womanhood, conveying a message of strength and empowerment.

Singer and composer **Becca Stevens** said, “*Thana Alexa’s ONA is an exquisite work embodying boundless creativity and genre that stretches to every corner of the Earth, and the imagination. ONA is a story of strength, authenticity, and the deeply grounding nature of the divine feminine.*”

ONA has spawned more female-focused projects: Alexa, together with Grammy® nominated artist, Nicole Zuraitis and bassist, Julia Adamy formed *SONICA*, a trio that fuses electronics, vocal harmonies, electric bass, keyboards and percussion into their unique original music and arrangements. Alexa also created the project *Founding Mothers of Jazz* in conjunction with *MusicTalks Concerts* to celebrate and honor the powerhouse women who helped build the jazz genre from the ground up, many of whom are not historically recognized for their contributions because of their gender.

During the 2020 Coronavirus lockdown, Alexa made headlines as a co-founder of what Rolling Stone called the first “virtual jazz festival” and fundraising initiative, *Live From Our Living Rooms*. Over the course of their three series (including a partnership with the DC Jazz Festival to present their *FromHome* series), Alexa, together with co-founders Owen Broder and Sirintip, contracted over 120 artists, raised over \$140,000, and helped facilitate grants to over 80 US based musicians in need. *Live From Our Living Rooms* received attention from Rolling Stone, Forbes, The Wall Street Journal, the Financial Times, the BBC, and more.

The New York Times has called Thana, “*a jazz singer with a global perspective*,” and **Billboard** has said, “*Thana Alexa stood out...something entirely new, evocative and exhilarating.*”

Perhaps Alexa’s most important and ongoing collaboration has been with her husband, five-time Grammy® winner Antonio Sanchez (composer for the Oscar winning *Birdman* film and drummer with Pat Metheny for 20 years). Together with his band *Migration* they have recorded three critically acclaimed albums including the most recent CAM Jazz recording *Lines in the Sand*, a protest record about the immigrant experience. The group has toured worldwide and electrified audiences throughout North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Australia.

Alexa's family history reads like an international novel cast with spies, military colonels, politicians, lawyers and philanthropic foundations, all set in a topflight European jazz club. Alexa was born in New York City to an American-Croatian mother and Croatian born father. Both of her parent's families fled communism in what was then Yugoslavia and emigrated to the U.S. after WWII. Her maternal grandfather, Marquis Frano de Bona – descendant of one of the oldest noble families in Dubrovnik – was a Lt. Commander in the Royal Yugoslav Navy and later became a double agent working for British Intelligence. He was awarded the Order of the British Empire by King George III for his contribution to the success of the D-Day invasion, the highest honor a foreigner can receive in Britain. One of her paternal great-grandfathers was a civil engineer and a Colonel in the Royal Yugoslav Army Special Forces and the other was a prominent politician, head of the Croatian Peasant Party, who was instrumental in the formation of Yugoslavia in 1918. Her paternal grandfather was a professor of medicine at NYU Medical School and plastic surgeon in private practice in New York City who also happened to play classical violin. Both of her parents were educated in the U.S. and enjoyed successful careers, her father as a Harvard educated lawyer, and her mother as an investment banker and later, President of a private foundation which gives grants in the arts.

Alexa was musical from a very early age. She began playing violin at the age of 4 and by 12 was first chair in the Stamford Youth Symphony (playing on her grandfather's instrument, no less!). She had ambitions to become a classical violinist. At 13, she moved with her family to Croatia and was challenged by learning a new language and by the cultural change of living in Europe. It was in Croatia that she discovered her voice, taking lessons with a voice teacher who introduced her to the music of jazz, blues and soul. At 16, she was discovered by world class jazz vibraphonist Bosko Petrovic, who is credited with bringing jazz to Croatia and who was her mentor until she returned to the U.S. for college.

Alexa graduated from the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music and Eugene Lang College with dual bachelor's degrees in jazz and contemporary music and psychology, respectively. During her time at the New School she was mentored by legendary drummer Bernard "Pretty" Purdie, who encouraged her to start composing and arranging for his ensemble. Alexa also became one of the first vocalists to involve herself in the New School's instrumental ensembles, quickly making a name for herself as an instrumental vocalist willing to explore the full range of the human voice. Professors Billy Harper, Jane Ira Bloom, Reggie Workman and Richard Harper all supported her on her mission as she began to experience her voice and music from the standpoint of an instrumentalist rather than a one-dimensional singer, which informed the compositions for her first album. That was the first surprise in what would be many surprises to come.

"As musicians, we have an incredible ability to reach people through art." *Alexa* said. "If you're making art it has to say something. Every turning point in the history of the world has involved art and artists connected to the movements of change. I want to be part of that."