

“Wendy Waldman - The Warner Brothers Years, As Well As Before & After”

Wendy Waldman was born Wendy Steiner on November 29th 1950 in the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital in Burbank, California. Her father, Fred Steiner, of Hungarian extraction, was born in N.Y.C. in 1923, is a composer and if you check the internet site IMDb [<http://us.imdb.com/>] you'll find that his soundtrack credits include music for television shows such as “Star Trek,” “Gunsmoke,” “Adventures Of Rocky And Bullwinkle” and numerous of episodes of “The Twilight Zone,” while his most famous composition is the “Perry Mason” theme. In fact music is an integral part of the Steiner gene, as Fred's father George was also a composer, and penned music for a number of Laurel & Hardy movies and the “Betty Boop” cartoon series. In her early years Wendy's mother, Shirley, was a professional violinist. It's hardly surprising that by the time Wendy reached her teens playing music was an abiding interest.

Wendy attended Oakwood Elementary in Oakwood, California where she met and befriended Andrew Gold [b. 2nd August 1951], the son of singer Marni Nixon. If you've ever heard the voice of Deborah Kerr's Anna in the movie “**The King And I**” [1956] and wondered why it resembles that of Natalie Wood's Maria in “**West Side Story**” [1961] and Audrey Hepburn's Eliza in “**My Fair Lady**” [1964] then you've heard Andrew's mother sing. Austrian born Ernest Gold, Andrew's father, is a film composer who wrote the Grammy Award winning soundtrack music to the movie “**Exodus**” [1960]. Waldman and Gold met Kenny Edwards [b. 10th February 1946] when he, Bobby Kimmel and Linda Ronstadt, aka the Stone Poneys, played a show at their school. Later, Edwards returned to take part in a lecture on transcendental meditation. In turn Edwards met singer/songwriter Karla Bonoff [b. 27th December 1951], and her sister Lisa, while attending a transcendental meditation course, on the California/Nevada border, at Lake Tahoe. Later, Gold met Karla and Kenny while attending The Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California.

Having recorded two albums for Capitol Records with the Stone Poney's, in 1968 Edwards departed the band – although he did contribute to the Poney's third album - and with Messrs. Bonoff, Gold and Waldman he formed the first incarnation of Bryndle. The band reputedly played its first date in the legendary Santa Monica guitar shop, McCabe's, on a bill that also featured Jackson Browne. By 1969 they had secured a recording deal with Herb Albert's A&M Records, and with Chuck Plotkin in charge of production cut an album that was never released. A single “Woke Up This Morning,” penned by Bonoff, and produced by Lou Adler [Mamas And Papas, Carole King], did see the light of day. Bryndle eventually broke up, and Gold and Edwards went on to form The Rangers. In 1974 the pair joined Linda Ronstadt's road band, and her solo career ignited commercially with the appearance that year of the “**Heart Like A Wheel**” album. Gold recorded his first solo album, for Asylum Records, during 1975. At Edwards' urging, during the latter half of the 1970's, Ronstadt recorded a number of Bonoff's compositions, while Karla eventually signed a solo recording deal and her self-titled debut, the first of three studio albums she cut for CBS Records, was released during 1977. We had to wait until the current millennium for Kenny Edwards to release his self-titled solo debut. First out of the blocks, however, in terms of recording a solo album, aged twenty-three, in 1973, Wendy Waldman signed a recording deal with Warner Brothers Records. The same year Maria Muldaur included two of Waldman's songs, “Mad Mad Me” and “Vaudeville Man,” on her self-titled album for Warner Brothers.

Charles ‘Chuck’ Plotkin [Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan and Bette Midler] produced Wendy's debut, “**Love Has Got Me**” [1973]. The session players included L.A. regulars of that era, Russ Kunkel [drums], Leland Sklar [bass] and Richard Greene [strings], plus there were backing vocals from Maria Muldaur and Greg Prestopino. While the Bryndle era album opener “Train Song” hints at the influence, it's the later “Horse Dream” that confirms a Laura Nyro slant in Waldman's songwriting at this stage in her career – particularly in terms of Wendy's percussive piano playing and use of repetitious lyrics [ala Nyro]. The opening cut also features Edward on bass, Gold on guitar, while the latter pair are joined by Bonoff on backing vocals. Elsewhere on Wendy's debut set, there's a mariachi feel to “Gringo En Mexico,” “Can't Come In” features a brass section, while Wendy's father arranged the strings on the fairy tale like “Pirate Ships” and also on “Thinking Of You.” Covered by Muldaur, the happy-go-lucky “Vaudeville Man” also confirms Waldman's penchant for featuring blues riffs in her tunes, while the chorus to “Lee's Travelling

Song” explores gospel territory. As for the wistful ballad “Waiting For The Rain” it makes for one of the most sublime moments on the recording. At the time of its release, Stephen Holding penned a feature about Waldman in Rolling Stone magazine, drawing the conclusion that “**Love Has Got Me**” was the “*singer/songwriter debut of the year.*”

The following year Waldman delivered her sophomore album “**Gypsy Symphony**” [1974]. Recorded in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and produced by Plotkin, the ‘deep south’ session players included Barry Beckett [keyboards], Pete Carr [guitar], Rogers Hawkins [drums], Jimmy Johnson [guitar] and David Hood [bass], plus the legendary Muscle Shoal Horns. As with Wendy’s debut set, back in California Messrs. Edwards, Bonoff and Gold added backgrounds vocals. “My Love Is All I Know” opens the album with a neat cyclical acoustic guitar riff, played by Waldman, while the gospel flavoured “The Good Love” would have made a superb single for Art Garfunkel. The urgent love song “My Name Is Love” is filled with extemporising horns and Waldman’s energetic vocal, and “Baby Don’t You Go” evidences Wendy at her hardcore blues best. There’s a countrified feel to “Northwoods Man,” and the penultimate cut is the ballad “Mad Mad Me” which Maria Muldaur had covered a few years earlier.

“**Wendy Waldman**” [1975] her third Warner’s release was produced by the late and legendary Nik Venet [Kingston Trio, John Stewart, Linda Ronstadt, Beach Boys, Fred Neil], who was ostensibly a house producer for Capitol Records roster of artists. Recorded at The Burbank Studio, there’s a lighter seventies West Coast singer/songwriter feel to the collection as evidenced by the opening cut “Western Lullaby,” “Spring Is Here” features Wendy on dulcimer, then there’s the goodtime sounding “Secrets” and the ballad “Wild Bird.” The traditional favourite “Green Rocky Road” closed the album, and was a first for Waldman in terms of being a cover song. Wendy was supported once more on the recording by Messrs. Edwards, Gold and Bonoff, and also by the voice of Jennifer Warren [aka Jenny Warnes], Peter Bernstein, the bass player in the original version of Bryndle, as well as by L.A. session stalwarts Stephen Ferguson [guitar] and Ron Tutt [drums]. Following the release of her third album Wendy went on the road with Peter Bernstein [upright bass], and Bobby Mason [drums]. According to an entry on Waldman’s web site “*We were a pretty good trio, and we put on a lot of miles that year. It was a tough year, as I recall.*”

Peter Bernstein, the son of composer Elmer Bernstein and a longtime acquaintance of Wendy’s, stepped up to the plate as producer of “**The Main Refrain**” [1976] and the session players included her old pals from Bryndle, plus Linda Ronstadt [backing vocals], Michael Botts [drums], Waddy Wachtel [guitar], Steve Cropper [guitar] and Taj Mahal [backing vocals]. Michael Boshears who had engineered and mixed Waldman’s previous solo recordings fulfilled the same roles on her fourth Warner’s disc. As she states in her liner note to this 2005 CD reissue, “**The Main Refrain**” was an attempt to recapture the production values embraced by “**Love Has Got Me.**” A religious theme underpins the lyric to the string laden “Is He Coming At All,” “Prayer For You” is a languid yet lyrically sad ballad, while “The Frenchman” is a true life story that unfolds to an accordion [Nick DeCaro] and percussion [Milt Holland] backing and relates how a soldier lost a hand fighting in a war. The album closer is the slow, jazz inflected blues “Back By Fall.”

Mock newspaper artwork adorned the cover of Waldman’s final Warner’s outing “**Strange Company**” [1978] and the recording sessions took place at album producer Mike Flicker’s Seattle studio. There’s no trace of her long time Bryndle buddies or of Boshears, and Wendy is supported throughout this “rock collection” by a band composed of Steve Beers [drums], Peter Bernstein [bass], Mark Goldenberg [guitar] and Craig Hull [guitar]. Relative to other cuts on Wendy’s fifth Warner’s release, there’s a less frenetic melodic approach taken in “You’ll See,” while there’s un-credited strings on the piano led ballad “Strange Company.” The closing track “Love Is The Only Goal” is Waldman’s tribute in word and melody to the songwriting of John Prine and Steve Goodman.

None of Wendy’s Warner Bros. album releases were major sellers, although the single “Long Hot Summer Nights,” from “**Strange Company,**” reached the Billboard Hot 100 Chart and peaked at # 76 in the late summer of 1978. During this period Wendy maintained a larger road band and toured with Al Stewart who was then enjoying hits with “Year Of The Cat” and “Time Passages.” As the seventies drew

to a close Messrs. Goldenberg and Bernstein teamed up with Steve Beers [drums] and Steve Leonard [keyboards, vocals] to form the new wave band The Cretones. The band cut two albums for Planet Records, and Linda Ronstadt included a trio of Goldenberg's songs on her 'new wave' album "**Mad Love**" [1980]. In the Fall of 2005 Collectors' Choice Records issued, for the first time on CD, Wendy's five Warner Bros. albums.

During 1980 Linda Ronstadt and Wendy Waldman performed a duet on Waldman's song "I Want A Horse" and the track appeared on the Grammy winning Best Recording for Children, "**In Harmony.**" Waldman's sixth solo album, recorded for the CBS subsidiary, Epic, and produced by Eddie Kramer was titled "**Which Way To Main Street**" [1982]. Waldman relocated to Nashville soon afterward the album was released, and went on to build a considerable reputation as a producer and hit songwriter. During her time in Nashville, Waldman had some seventy songs covered. The latter includes the Nitty Gritty Dirt band # 1 Country Single "Fishin In The Dark."

Self-produced, "**Letters Home**" [1987] was recorded at the 1030 Studio in Nashville and released by the now defunct, California based, Cypress Records. One of Waldman's earliest productions, for another artist, was Suzy Bogguss' debut album "**Somewhere Between**" for which the Illinois bred songbird won the Academy of Country Music's 1989 New Artist Award. With Phil Galdston and John Lind, Wendy co-wrote "Save The Best For Last" which scored Vanessa Williams a 1992 # 1 Pop [for five weeks], Adult Contemporary and R&B Chart hit. The song was nominated for a 1992 Pop Female Vocal Grammy, and Williams' follow-up hit single "The Sweetest Days" was penned by the same team. Concurrently Waldman scored a Wrangler Award from the Cowboy Hall of Fame when Michael Martin Murphey covered "Corn, Water And Wood" a song she had co-written with Carol Elliott.

In the early 1990's Waldman moved back to California, and the plan to reform Bryndle coalesced in the next few years. The band played its first concert in two decades at a Billy Block organised Western Beat concert at Highland Grounds in Hollywood during 1994. The following year the Music Masters label released a self-titled album by the group. Gold left the band the following year, after relocating his family to Connecticut. Bryndle, now a trio, went on to release "**House Of Silence**" [2001] and the house concert recording "**Live At Russ And Julie's**" [2003]. During 1997 Warner Brothers issued "**Love Is The Only Goal : The Best Of Wendy Waldman**" an eighteen track retrospective of Waldman's five albums for the imprint, and in 2003 Wendy self-released "**Seeds And Orphans**" her first solo album in a decade and a half. Proof that she was still placing songs on significant roots music releases, a couple of years earlier, Alison Krauss covered Waldman's "I'm Gone" on her Grammy winning recording "**New Favourite.**"

In addition to writing/recording/producing and performing in public, Waldman has taught workshops at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, Rocky Mountain Folks Festival and the Kerrville Folk Festival and has served on ASCAP, NSAI and BMI panels and workshops. Wendy has also been a panel judge for ASCAP's Sammy Cahn Award and the Telluride Bluegrass Festival songwriting competition. These days Waldman works out of The Longhouse, her Los Angeles studio/house. In a career as a performing musician and songwriter, now spanning almost four decades, in addition to those performers already mentioned, Wendy's songs have been recorded by Kim Carnes, Randy Travis, Randy Meisner, Edgar Winter, Jesse Colin Young, Percy Sledge, Juice Newton, Linda Ronstadt, Judy Collins, Melissa Manchester, Rita Coolidge and Bette Midler.

Arthur Wood
Kerrville Kronikles 12/05
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