

Susan Werner – Bio

Susan Werner was born during the mid-sixties in Manchester, Iowa and grew up on her father's hog farm, in a German Catholic family that included six children. At the age of five Susan made her stage debut, strumming a guitar and singing "It's A Small World." Six years later, Werner began taking piano lessons and during her High School years also playing saxophone in jazz combos and marching bands. Furthermore, she regularly took the lead in High School stage musicals. When the Werner family "*packed up the station wagon*" and went visiting her grandparents, musical gatherings around the piano were a regular feature of the visits.

By the mid eighties, Susan had graduated with a degree in voice from the University of Iowa. She then moved to Philadelphia in 1987, and three years later gained her master's degree in voice and musical history from Temple University. Werner decided to remain in Philadelphia, with the intention of pursuing a career as an opera singer. Early in the nineties, though personally disappointed, she abandoned that goal, tempering her decision with the conclusion that she would never have made the grade.

Warner attended a Nanci Griffith concert toward the close of the eighties and was moved by the Texan's performance. Susan's musical interests *pre-Griffith* had lain in classical music, show tunes and jazz. With regard to the latter genre, at that stage, Warner played piano in a trio at Philadelphia's Pen & Pencil club. Soon after the Griffith concert, Werner began performing as a solo act in local bars and coffee houses. While her set initially consisted of cabaret standards, she soon began inserting her own compositions.

Werner performed at the prestigious Philadelphia Folk Festival in 1992. "**Midwestern Saturday Night**," was the title of Susan's independently financed, debut album. Produced by Grant MacAvoy and recorded at Morning Star Studios, the ten-song disc was released early in 1993. Nine self-penned songs, composed between 1989 and 1992, are augmented by Greg Simon's "The Great Out There." Lyrically, the collection displayed a fertile imagination at work. While many songwriters in the folk/country arena focus on the confessional, Werner is an observational writer and storyteller, whose work is laced with positive attitude and barbed humour.

Werner initially managed her own business affairs, maintained a *manually* generated mailing list, and approached clubs for dates by sending out press kits and cassettes. Having approached Larry Goldfarb and Ric Cohen of Golden Guru Management, for a gig at Philadelphia's Tin Angel club, the pair began managing her career. Werner was soon one of the most talked about *new* songwriters on the Internet. Her sophomore album "**Live at Tin Angel**" was recorded during June, August and October 1993 appearances at the club, and was a fifteen-song collection. That year Issue # 706 [July] of the New York based **Fast Folk Magazine** was titled "**Philadelphia Phast Pholks**" and Werner contributed her own, previously unrecorded "Irene." During September 1993, Susan was invited to perform at the second Martha's Vineyard Singer/Songwriters' Retreat, organised by Christine Lavin. The 2CD compilation titled "**Follow That Road**," released the following year by the Rounder/Philo label, featured her performing "Born A Little Late [The Baby Boomer Song]."

Her first two CD's had been self-released, but for her third album Werner signed with Los Angeles based, Private Music, and "**Last of the Good Straight Girls**," produced by Fernando Saunders, was released in March 1995. Apart from Paul Simon's "Something So Right," Werner penned the remaining decade of cuts, while Saunders' is credited with supplying *additional music* to three of them. Guests on the sessions included Marshall Crenshaw, Greg Leisz and producer/musician Mitchell Froom. The label later collapsed and Werner was left without a deal.

In 1996 when Peter, Paul & Mary cut "**LifeLines Live**," Werner was one of the guest performers and accompanying Paul Stookey performed "For The Love Of It All." Along with the other guests Werner contributed to the closing cut "River Of Jordan." On the Signature Sounds Recordings compilation "**Live At The Iron Horse, Vol. 1**" [1997], Susan performed "Maybe If I Played Cole Porter." Werner has also appeared on albums by Michael Veitch "**NY Journal**" [1998], Pete Nelson "**Days Like Horses**" [2000] and The Nields "**If You Lived Here You'd Be Home By Now**" [2000].

Susan cut her next album in Nashville at Love Shack Studio, and the project was supervised by Guy Clark associate, Darrell Scott. Released by NY based Bottom Line Records in September 1998, the disc was titled "**Time Between Trains**." Tennessee based players on the sessions included Darrell, Kenny

Malone and Victor Krauss. She also recorded her 2001 self-released album **“New Non-Fiction”** in Nashville. Produced by Canadian born blues guitarist, Colin Lindon, and cut at Deep Field and Oceanway in Nashville, the session musicians included Lindon, Richard Bell, Byron House, Tammy Rogers and Jon Randall. The album closed with one of Susan’s finest compositions to date, “May I Suggest”

The following year Werner’s Spring tour of New England was filmed by Harry Keates resulting in the musical documentary DVD release **“All Mapped Out”** [2002], and it included scenes of Werner in her new home base of Chicago, Illinois. Werner’s latest American Songbook styled recording featuring her own original compositions, **“I Can’t Be New”** was released by Koch Records in March 2004. Co-produced with Glenn Barratt [Catherine Tuttle, Antje Duvekot, Cherish The Ladies, Seamus Egan], Werner self-released **“The Gospel Truth”** on her Sleeve Dog Records label in early March 2007. Like its predecessor, the eleven songs on **“The Gospel Truth,”** entirely penned by Susan, constituted a thematic collection. Recorded on 31st May and 1st June 2007, **“Live @ Club Passim,”** was an thirteen track collection that mostly reprised already released material and was issued during the early summer of the following year.

Discography :

Solo : **“Midwestern Saturday Night”** [1993] ; **“Live at the Tin Angel”** [1993] ; **“Last of the Good Straight Girls”** [1995] ; **“Time Between Trains”** [1998] ; **“New Non-Fiction”** [2001] ; **“I Can’t Be New”** [2004] ; **“The Gospel Truth”** [2007] ; **“Live @ Club Passim”** [2008] :

On DVD : **“All Mapped Out”** [2002] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 04/04, 02/07 & 11/08.

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