

## Blossoming Into Her Own

By Marcia C. Dibble

"I am definitely a retro woman," says **Jaye Maynard** BFA'85, who has been receiving accolades for her musical homage to the late jazz singer-songwriter Blossom Dearie. Maynard's nickname is JayeBird, and her show *Bird Amongst the Blossom: A Tribute to the First Blossom Dearie Songbook*—styled as a midcentury-modern New York supper club act à la 1962—features Maynard on vocals, replicating the "wised-up baby-doll jazz stylings" of Dearie, with backup on piano and upright bass, interpreting songs written for and by Dearie in collaboration with such artists as Johnny Mercer, Dave Frishberg, and Bob Dorough (with whom Dearie worked on the popular children's educational series *Schoolhouse Rock!*).



(Photo by Matthew Karas)

Maynard is hoping to bring her *Blossom* show to Utah this year as the opener for her friend John Ciccolini's coming-of-age musical-comedy *Frank Sinatra Screwed Up My Life*. That double-header had its premiere this February at the M Bar—"red leather banquettes and Italian food," Maynard notes fondly—in Hollywood, California. A Midwest native, Maynard spent more than 10 years in southern California after graduating from the U (finding her niche by looking "more East Coast amongst a sea of blondes") before moving to New York about 15 years ago.

Maynard's master's thesis in vocal performance at New York University (completed in 2002) was called "Jaye Sings: The Barbie Show," in which she

wore a recreated Barbie dress and performed songs including numbers from a "Barbie Sings!" collection put out by Mattel in 1961. Early this year, she moved back to Madison, Wisconsin, her hometown, as a "bicoastal" base and to take her show around the Midwest.

Maynard was theatrical from childhood and says she has always been fascinated by the 1950s and early '60s era in which her parents grew up. "I like to fantasize I was reincarnated from a 1940s big band singer turned '50s housewife," she says. A recent participant at the renowned International Cabaret Conference at Yale University, Maynard runs her own PlaidBird Productions, and she is also a producer with Angry Girl Gang Productions, which she co-owns with fellow U alum **Mark W. Knowles** BFA'85, a longtime friend and collaborator. Maynard was attracted to the U in great part because it offered "an actual musical theater program," with classes from dance to music to theater and the chance to earn an Equity card at the same time. She performed in regional productions, including four shows with Pioneer Theatre Company, before being handpicked for a tour of *Pirates of Penzance*, and then moved to LA after the tour's conclusion. There, besides the period pieces that are her love, Maynard also leapt at other opportunities, including performing improv and studying with Second City. She later appeared in the comedy-horror film *Moonshine*, which screened at the Sundance Film Festival, before starring in Aaliyah Miller's short film *After The Headlines*, about a mother coming to terms with her daughter's murder, which won several awards on the independent film festival circuit.

But *Blossom* has become her passion, and its namesake, her muse. "She was a self-producing artist, and she created an independent record label way back in the '70s; no one was doing it back then," says Maynard. After Dearie died in 2009, Maynard tracked down her songbook and began developing it into a show, and she eventually acquired Dearie's last apartment piano on eBay. Maynard called on her longtime friend **Dorian DeMichele** BFA'84 to help her produce the show, and it had its theatrical debut in 2011 in the United Solo Theater Festival, in New York. The show has since been recognized as a Pick of the Week by the *International Review of Music*. "I know I'm going to be doing this for the rest of my life; maybe not the Blossom Dearie songbook, but this niche of jazz cabaret where you are expressing yourself truthfully through the story of song," Maynard says.

—Marcia Dibble is managing editor of Continuum.



Jaye Maynard worked with fellow U students Mark W. Knowles and David G. Smith MFA'82 on the first iteration of what became their *Plan 9 From Outer Space: The Musical*. (Photo courtesy Jaye Maynard)



Jaye Maynard, center (in *Girl Gang*), did her first major work as a producer on the musical, which won a place at the New York International Fringe Festival and the New York Musical Theatre Festival. (Photo courtesy Maynard)



Jaye Maynard, shown here in 2013 running errands in New York on her bicycle, is known for her fascination and identification with plaid, which she calls "the fabric of collaboration." (Photo by Lawrence Bianco)



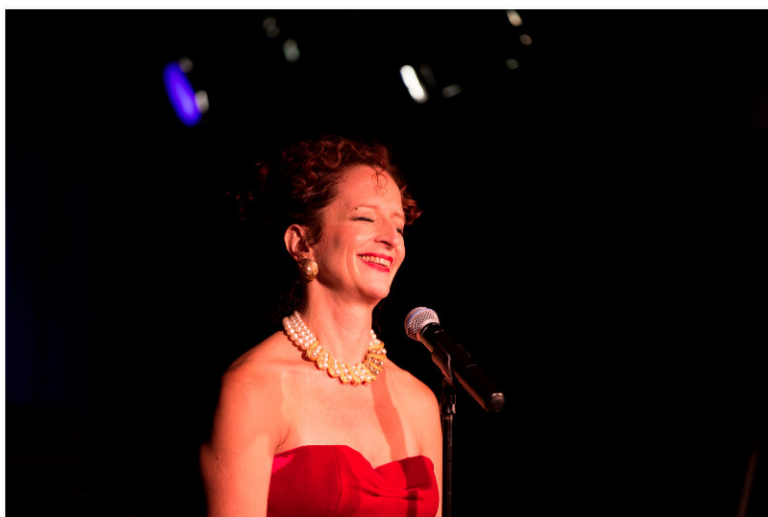
Jaye Maynard's show *Bird Amongst the Blossom* first previewed in 2010-11 at the HourGlass Tavern "in the heart of Times Square, across the street from Danny's Skylight Room where Blossom Dearie played for 10 years," she says. (Photo courtesy Jaye Maynard)



Jaye Maynard acquired Blossom Dearie's last apartment piano, shown here in Maynard's own New York apartment. In some performances of *Bird Amongst the Blossom*, East Coast band-member Jon Delfin has accompanied Maynard on Dearie's piano. (Photo courtesy Jaye Maynard)



Jaye Maynard performs her *Blossom* show at the West Bank Café in New York in 2012. "Blossom had a really high voice, and I'm a mezzo-soprano," says Maynard, "but my voice lends itself to the material." Maynard realized many years later that she had first been captivated by Blossom Dearie's voice as a child when she heard Dearie sing "Figure Eight" on *Schoolhouse Rock!* (Photo by Matthew Karas)



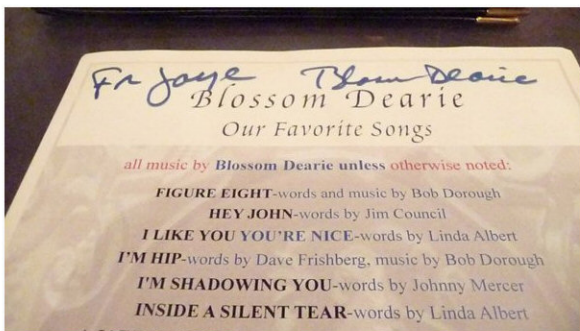
Jaye Maynard reproduced a vintage Barbie doll dress for her *Bird Amongst the Blossom* show. "I have spent my life collecting vintage clothing and eyewear, and Barbie, to replicate her wardrobe," Maynard says. Here, she performs her *Blossom* show at the West Bank Café in New York. (Photo by Matthew Karas)



Jaye Maynard's *Bird Amongst the Blossom* show always includes Maynard recounting anecdotes from Blossom Dearie's life, as well as her own. Maynard rediscovered Dearie in the 1980s, as a young adult, when she came across a CD of Dearie singing jazz standards in French. Here, Maynard performs in her *Blossom* show at the West Bank Café in New York, with Jon Delfin on piano and Leon Lee Dorsey on upright bass. (Photo by Matthew Karas)



Jaye Maynard describes Blossom Dearie and her cohorts as "smart, sassy, sexy lyricists." Dearie was an arranger and accompanist for the likes of Mel Tormé before a friend encouraged her to start singing, and she became very popular in the 1940s and '50s with the heyday of jazz. (Photo by Matthew Karas)



After waning in popularity in America for years (though she maintained a stronger fan base in London and Paris), Blossom Dearie enjoyed a cult resurgence in the U.S. in the 1980s, and after rediscovering her, Jaye Maynard was able to see her in concert and meet her backstage. (Photo courtesy Jaye Maynard)