



Music from the Front Porch

*Anais St. John
performs live
for neighbors
and online fans*

By Anita Oubre

A worldwide pandemic could not stop a fabulous cabaret show. The show would go on even if it meant taking it to the front porch.

Throughout the summer of 2020 people from all over the world have enjoyed the rich, sultry voice of Anais St. John. She has performed every Saturday for the past several months from her Algiers Point front porch stage in a series appropriately dubbed “Porch Fest.” Accompanied by her longtime pianist, Harry Mayronne, the two of them treat the masses - both in-person and streamed - to a show that spans decades and continents.

“The show is being shared all over the world, but quite simply, it is a small festival happening in my own front yard,” Anais said. “Every Saturday there are a handful of people who socially distance themselves out on the sidewalks and bring their wine and appetizers. But I also have friends who have driven eight hours to come to socially distance see me perform.”

Anais’s home serves as the backdrop in perfect nightclub hues of blue and purple. The audience ranges from mask-donned neighbors sitting in lawn chairs spread out along the sidewalk to people streaming in from as far away as France. Anais looks forward to these performances that she calls “a life saver.”

The idea was kindled early in the pandemic; back in March when people in Italy gathered at their windows every evening to sing a cappella, Anais explained, adding, “It was such a beautiful gesture and it brought some hope to a desperate time.” Her neighbors suggested they could all sing along with each other from their respective porches. “It was inspirational and the need for a musical escape was huge,” she continued.

From those first few singalongs the event grew. Anais rolled out the piano and called upon Mayronne who, she says, “is versatile and able to transpose beautifully.” The duo has collaborated over many projects together for at least fifteen years.

Initially the two selected music they had already performed such as songs by Tina Turner which they playfully called “Quarantina.” They have covered everything from Eartha Kitt to Cher to Donna Summer. Suggestions from fans rolled in and then the decision

was made to keep the show rolling by performing music from each decade. A fan favorite is the sultry “Don’t you Feel My Leg” by “Blue Lu” Barker, although they try to be true to the theme of the week.

Born and raised in New Orleans, Anais lived in the Seventh Ward and attended Corpus Christi School where she excelled singing in the choir. She majored in music at Xavier University and holds a Master’s degree from the University of New Orleans. While studying, Anais was taken by surprise when she realized that opera was part of the curriculum. However, she fell completely in love with it and for a number of years sang mezzo-soprano with the New Orleans Opera Chorus.

Cultivated in jazz, cabaret and musical theater, as well as opera, Anais has a unique sound. Her passion for her craft is evident in every song she performs. In the early days of her performing career, she worked as a cocktail waitress and would sit in with a jazz trio in between serving

guests. She loved watching the shows while waitressing at the former Le Chat Noir cabaret in the late ‘90s/early 2000s

and remembers telling herself, “I am going to do this.”

Anais credits her mother for the initial inspiration she felt for her craft. She was a single mom who made a happy

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home and stressed the importance of education, Anais recalled. Holding two Master’s degrees in theology and social work, she is an eloquent speaker, involved in church and constant service to others, Anais added.

“My mom is phenomenal. She has always been a strong role model for me and she is selfless in helping others who cannot help themselves,” Anais proudly noted.

Anais’s musical influences are Germaine Bazzle “for her grace, musicianship and style,” as well as Irma Thomas. “These women put in all the hard work. The longevity of their careers speaks volumes. I look up to them because they have handled themselves so classy. They have always been strong, confident, elegant role models,” Anais said.

Anais is, herself, a role model giving freely of her spirit and passion for not only music, but for other musicians as well as her students. She worries about her fellow musicians during this pandemic, not only on a financial level because so many gig workers, musicians and hospitality workers are out of work, but on an emotional level as well. Anais intensely explained that, for entertainers, it is not just a paycheck but a lifestyle.

“The way of life as we know it is all gone. This is what concerns me. If I couldn’t sing I’d be a mess,” Anais said. “My heart aches for musicians who do not have a day job. They are living off their savings and there is a general lack of money even for those who are live-streaming from their living rooms.”

Anais looks forward to reconnecting with her students at Trinity Episcopal where she teaches music. She enjoys starting her school days with a chapel service each morning that includes prayer, song and meditation. Living the values that she helps to instill in her students is encouraging.

“Putting others before yourself, being kind, treating each other with respect, taking care of the poor are all universal ways to be good to one another while we are here on this earth,” Anais proclaimed.



Before COVID-19 Anais performed regular gigs at the Starlight, the Old Point Bar, and the Windsor Court and Downtown Hyatt Regency hotels and she was preparing to perform at upcoming festivals.

In recent years she had performed sold-out tributes to Tina Turner and Donna Summer at the Joy Theater and the AllWays Lounge. She had also done modeling for locally produced fashion shows. Now she is focusing her energy in a healthy way by exercising and enjoying time with her husband and twelve-year-old daughter.

“Listening to music helps. I keep it on constantly while working in the house,” Anais reflected. “I miss being in front of a band and I miss dancing which is an amazing way to deal- it washes away everything bad.”

Anais remains hopeful and feels that “We will all come out with a greater respect for one another after surviving the last few months.” She says that a return to appreciating the little things like spending time together, healthy living and being with family are what we should focus on.

“The artist, the people that we walk by and take for granted are gone for now but they will be back,” said Anais. “We must be mindful, selfless and take care of one another so that we can all return.”

Online performances are every Saturday at 4 p.m. at [facebook.com/AnaisSt.JohnJazz](https://www.facebook.com/AnaisSt.JohnJazz).

Virtual tips can be made to the performers via Venmo and PayPal.