



### Tommy Gearhart - Bio

A sensitive yet powerful jazz vocalist who loves to sing ballads, **Tommy Gearhart** has developed his own sound as he explores the Great American Songbook and jazz standards. “I grew up hearing those songs. My grandmother and her sisters used to sing on the radio as the Thomas Sisters. My grandfather was a crooner who had worked with big bands in the Midwest, knew a lot of tunes, and could also play ragtime piano. The music is in my blood.”

Born in Toledo, Ohio, Tommy Gearhart spent much of his childhood there and in Detroit. Growing up in the 1980s, he started out listening to the punk rock and pop music of the day. As a young teenager, he became serious about jazz and began his musical career as a jazz drummer, playing with local bands. He modestly remembers, “I’m a pretty tall guy at 6’5” and I was often hired in the Midwest to work with a lot of organists, partly because I could help them carry their instruments!” He studied history and sociology at the University of New Mexico while having private music lessons, and went to graduate school at the College of Santa Fe. After working for a representative on Capitol Hill on education legislation, and having performed mini tours in the Southwest, East, and Midwest, Tommy eventually moved to New York, keeping busy with steady work on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue at the Setai, a five star luxury hotel now called the Langham, amongst other clubs that presented jazz.

Having accompanied many singers as a drummer, when he was 25 he thought to himself, “I want to do that and think I can, so I dug in and got to work on my studies!” Blessed with a warm baritone voice and influenced by his jazz background, he developed quickly as a vocalist. His mentor was Jon Hendricks, who was also from Toledo and with whom he worked on multiple occasions. The young vocalist was also inspired by the swing of Frank Sinatra, the depth of Andy Bey, the musicianship and artistry of Jon Hendricks and Mark Murphy, various other male and female singers, and the many instrumentalists who he heard. He listened to everyone, did a great deal of study, and emerged with his own highly appealing voice.

Tommy Gearhart has since performed at many jazz clubs and festivals around the U.S. and Canada, and, in addition to Jon Hendricks, worked with Detroit tenor-saxophonist Donald Walden (whom dubbed Tommy a “true balladeer”), trumpeter-educator Marcus Belgrave, and guitarist Peter Bernstein among others.

In 2007 he made his recording debut with *Autumn Serenade*, a set of standards. 2013's *I Fall In Love Too Easily* is quite impressive, a set with a sextet that includes trumpeter Bobby Shew and tenor-saxophonist Doug Lawrence. "It showcases the repertoire of my New York period. It includes some great ballads, a Bill Heid tune from an organ project for which I wrote the lyrics ('Psychological Operations'), a fine Meredith d'Ambrosio song ('Melodious Funk') and a variety of standards."

Since that time, Tommy Gearhart has relocated to Phoenix ("I realized that that would be a great place for me to bring up my children and has a centrally located international airport") and continued to grow as a singer. He has presented several types of special projects, including for symphony orchestra and small group with a string quartet. His soon to be debuted *Keys To The World* has its name taken from Tony Bennett's response when asked if he ever got tired of singing the same song (*I Left My Heart In San Francisco*) for years. His response was, "How can I get tired of the song that gave me the *Keys To The World*?" After having seen Bennett's final show with Lady Gaga at Radio City Music Hall, Gearhart was inspired to put together a retrospective of Tony Bennett's career with *I Left My Heart In San Francisco* as the primary theme that develops throughout the performance. *Dear Frank and the Boys* is a swinging big band show of music that was performed by Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett and some more recent singers. Gearhart also performs other productions (including *Basie & Blues* and *Swingin' Christmas*) in settings ranging from a duo and a quintet to big bands.

In 2009, Tommy Gearhart was appointed as a Commissioner on the New Mexico Music Commission which preserves, cultivates, and develops music in New Mexico. He also serves on several leadership boards and he founded *Healing, Harmony, & Heart*, an annual jazz benefit concert that raises money and awareness for many causes, and most recently, those with mental health issues.

A major production that is very close to Tommy Gearhart's heart and supports his quest for improved mental health services, is titled *Notes Of Love & Despair*; its recording is expected to be released sometime in 2023. "The genesis of the idea took place years ago when I told Bobby Shew that I could sing ballads all night long and he agreed that he would love playing a full night of ballads too." Recorded at the Eastman School Of Music around the time of the outbreak of the pandemic, the singer is joined by a jazz trio and a 47 member symphony orchestra drawn from the school's staff, students, and alumni. They form a symphony orchestra and big band that performs lush and often-swinging arrangements by George Darrah. "I recorded 12 ballads in the tradition of Frank Sinatra's *Only The Lonely* album although in my phrasing I play around with the melody much more and I also add my own ideas to the music." The project, which has occasional solos by Bobby Shew, was co-produced by Chase Ellison who is himself a talented drummer. For the live show, which is called *Notes Of Love*, the singer includes six additional songs that are medium or uptempo for variety.

The recording of *Notes Of Love & Despair* is essentially a two-act musical play with the first half being songs that convey the experience of falling in love while the second act is about falling out of love and longing for the lost love. Backed by the symphony orchestra, Tommy Gearhart is heard at his most expressive on such classics as "Skylark," "My Foolish Heart," "You've

Changed,” “Goin’ To Chicago” (a tip of the hat to Jon Hendricks), and “You Don’t Know What Love Is.” In addition to being part of the love cycle suite, each performance stands on its own as superior ballad singing and makes the case for Tommy Gearhart being considered one of the top balladeers around today.

“I look forward to releasing this incredibly personal album and singing these wonderful songs for audiences. There are few things I love more than performing high-quality music for audiences who love to listen, honoring the tradition while playing fresh versions of great songs.”