

A close-up portrait of Allan Harris, a man with a grey goatee and a dark hat, looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. The background is a solid blue color.

Allan Harris

LIVE AT BLUE LLAMA
REVIEWS

2023

All About Jazz

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ALL ABOUT JAZZ

Allan Harris has had a varied musical journey. Brooklyn-born, he grew up surrounded by the sounds of jazz, blues, and R&B. His mother often played records by artists like Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. These influences shaped his musical sensibilities and inspired him to pursue a music career.

He recorded his debut album, *Setting The Standard* (Love Records) in 1994 at the age of 38. Over the next 27 years, he released 12 more records of various types of material, including *Cross That River* (Love Records, 2006), which he composed as a musical look at the history of the African-American cowboy. Another release was *The Genius of Eddie Jefferson* (Resilience, 2018) with Richie Cole (who was instrumental in Jefferson's late-period revival before the tragic shooting that ended his life). It is a loving tribute to the Godfather of vocalese.

Harris has released albums with big bands and in piano/vocal duos. During the pandemic, he and his tight-knit band gained international recognition for their "Harlem After Dark" live-stream concerts, which brought audiences into Harris' lively living room every Tuesday night. That experience led directly to the decision to record *Live At The Blue Llama* in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Curated from two shows performed there in January 2023, this release captures the essence of the performer in his natural element.

The first track, "Sunny" shows that Harris stamps his mark on his choice of standards. The pianist, Arcoiris Sandoval, immediately makes an impression on the audience, while Harris croons in a style reminiscent of a mix between Nat King Cole and Al Jarreau. Later, a cover of the Chick Corea/Jarreau version of "Spain" brings home that influence. Irwin Hall shines here on flute with a solo both whimsical and then forceful.

"Jeannine" by Duke Pearson, is done in a pensive, carrying a torch, manner. It provides a different vibe than the Brown Jr or Eddie Jefferson up-tempo versions. As the lyric says, "The dollar signs stood in between, It was a love lost to the rising cost." A Jefferson vocalese version of Miles Davis' "So What" gets a strong reading here. The solos by Sandoval and Hall (on tenor) are on point and appreciated by the rapt audience.

Harris is also an accomplished guitarist, able to play many styles. Here he is heard playing the electric slide guitar on the slow, simmering "Black Coffee Blues." It is an old-style double-entendre-filled blues. Bassist Marty Kenney and drummer Norman Paul Edwards jr lay down the groove while Harris shows off his guitar chops increasing the intensity of his playing until the simmer spills over to a boiling climax.

The album's centerpiece is the closing track "Nature Boy." The standard is played as an up-tempo romp with a wonderful arrangement by Sandoval. His piano playing here is captivating. Harris vamps over the intro, then pushes the song forward before the rest of the band gets their turn in the spotlight.

Over the years, Harris has found his niche as a later-day cabaret singer. It is a time-honored genre that has evolved since Bobby Short reigned supreme at The Carlyle in Manhattan for over three decades. His success in part is twofold. He is a real storyteller, able to traverse many different styles of song. From classic and contemporary jazz, popular standards, blues and originals, his remarkable sense of phrasing, impeccable timing, and wide vocal range allow him to make each song choice his own. The other reason is his innate ability to connect with audiences everywhere. He is as popular in places like Russia, Japan and Turkey as he is at home. It is these abilities that have seen him win the New York Nightlife Award for "Outstanding Jazz Vocalist" three times.

This release provides a current snapshot of what Harris does best; singing live in an intimate setting, accompanied by an empathetic band while performing in front of an adoring audience.

Allan Harris

07/03/2023



06.07.2023

Allan Harris is a very experienced vocalist with an excellent reputation. Sometimes he is even called the "jazz vocal king of New York", and the Miami Herald newspaper finds in his voice "the warmth of Tony Bennett, the sharpness and sense of rhythm of Sinatra and the sly elegance of Nat King Cole." Harris's popularity rose even further during the days of the pandemic lockdown, when every Tuesday he streamed live concerts under the title Harlem After Dark from his own apartment on the Web every Tuesday. Allan has amassed an impressive discography of fourteen albums over the years, the latest being Kate's [Soulfood](#) (2021). But there were no new live albums in this collection for thirteen years. This streak was interrupted by the release of Live at Blue Llama.

This album was recorded at the Blue Llama club, well known to him, in Ann Arbor, Michigan in January 2023. Harris was assisted by his permanent ensemble: the piano trio Sandoval- [Kenny-Advads](#) and saxophonist Irwin Hill. It must be said right away that the instrumental part of the concert with spectacular solos by Sandoval and Hill was at its best. Allan introduced four of his own compositions into the program of that concert: New Day, which sounded in the studio version at Kate's [Soulfood](#), the very pleasant blues Black Coffee Blues and two more songs: the old There She Goes and the brand new Shimmering Deep Blue Sea. But most of the program was still standards.

The album opens with Bobby Hebb's song Sunny, well-known for many interpretations. Allan remembers him from childhood and invariably includes him in his concerts. Those who only remember the disco version from the clowns of Boney M will be able to, finally, to hear how this composition really sounds. Another "signature" number of Allan Harris is Spain by Chick [Corea](#) with text by Al [Jarro](#): for my taste, the best track of the album. And there is also So What? Miles Davis, and The Very Thought of You by Ray Noble, and the final Nature Boy, which stretched for a whole eleven-odd minutes. I think fans of classic jazz vocals in the male version will not be bored by this album.

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author: [Leonid AUSKERN](#)

bebop spoken here

Wednesday, July 19, 2023

Album review: Allan Harris - Live at Blue LLama Jazz Club

Allan Harris (vocals/guitar); Acoiris Sandoval (piano/keys); Irwin Hall (sax/flute); Marty Kenney (bass); Norman Edwards (drums/cajon).



Known stateside as the *Jazz Vocal King of New York*, Harris has stunned audiences for over four decades. I can't recall him making a similar impact this side of the pond which, upon listening to this album, seems quite incredible. Harris should be rated alongside Lambert, Hendricks, Ross, Chet, Murphy, Witherspoon and the other jazz singers who pepper the pages of jazz vocal literature - Harris is in that league.

This session in Ann Arbor, Michigan at the Blue LLama Club is what live jazz is all about. Hip vocals, audience communication and a band that delivers 100%.

Individual interpretations of standards plus four of his own compositions* make the January 2023 recording one of this year's outstanding vocal albums. However, let's not get too carried away by the vocals as the band is equally fantastic. There's Harris' own funky blues guitar playing on *Black Coffee Blues*, Edwards' drumming on *Spain* and the uptempo *Nature Boy* (best ever version of one of my least favourite songs), Hall's saxing and fluting throughout, pianist (and Harris' MD) Sandoval's superb solos - she can swing, comp and fly high when unleashed. Of course, without Kenney on bass it would be like Chicken Fried Rice without the rice.

The more I listen, the more I like it. *Sunny*; *Jeannine*; *The Very Thought of You* all get the adrenaline working but, here's the kicker - Allan Harris reminds me of our own, the late Dave Weisser and there could be no greater compliment to either singer! *Lance*

Available July 28 on Blue LLama Records.

* *New Day*; *Black Coffee Blues*; *Shimmering Deep Blue Sea*; *There She Goes*.



THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD

Live at Blue Llama Jazz Club
Allan Harris (Live at Blue Llama)
by Marilyn Lester

The prolific singer/songwriter/guitarist Allan Harris releases his 15th album in the soulful *Live at Blue Llama Jazz Club*, recorded at the Ann Arbor club this past January. In ten eclectic tracks, what's evident is that this collection is as much about the Harris band as it is about the vocalist. The unit is Harris' working band, consisting of Arcoiris Sandoval (piano, keyboards), Marty Kenney (bass), Norman Edwards (drums) and Irwin Hall (saxophone, flute), all of whom turn in dazzling performances throughout.

Opener "Sunny" (Bobby Hebb), with its driving tempo and Harris' interpretation of the lyric as a firm declaration of love, sets a gospelly tone of the sort pop vocalist Tom Jones often favored. Harris' smooth baritone is flexible in range, but always invested in storytelling, from nuanced blues, such as the stellar "Black Coffee Blues", on which Harris lets loose on guitar, to the story songs "New Day" and "Shimmering Deep Blue Sea". Although Harris isn't too guitar forward on many of the tracks, "There She Goes" features prime guitar work along with a lyrical solo by Hall. Reaching back in his repertoire to his first live album, *Long Live the King* (2010), Harris ladles on the honey, turning out a slow, seductive and dishy ballad in "The Very Thought of You" (Ray Noble). On another Harris staple, "Spain" (Chick Corea, Al Jarreau), the singer dives right into the tune, without an instrumental intro. With "So What" (Miles Davis, Eddie Jefferson), Harris proves his mettle, effortlessly tossing off the vocalese. It's a fun listen, particularly in its allusion to the time that Davis and John Coltrane, not happy with their performance, walked off stage to practice before returning to play. The closing track, "Nature Boy" (eden ahbez), features a stunning arrangement by Sandoval, with a big band feel and creative vocalizations. Harris has the ability to utilize his voice like an instrument, and he does so here with repeated phrases from the lyric bookending the chorus.

Live at Blue Llama Jazz Club is a must for Harris fans and anyone who wants to experience how brilliantly a tight unit can perform. What's more, the album's use of minimal, judicious editing ensures that the power of live performance comes through loud and clear, which makes for especially satisfying listening.

Soul & Jazz & Funk



One of my favourite albums over the last couple of years is ALLAN HARRIS'S 'Kate's Soulfood'. To my shame I knew very little about Mr Harris save that he is a Brooklyn-born, Harlem-based soul and jazz vocalist/guitarist/bandleader/composer who made his recording debut way back in 1994! He has a slew of albums to his name and Tony Bennett no less once described him as his favourite singer! 'Kate's Soulfood' yielded plenty of gems like the lovely 'Autumn' and the magical 'I Grew Up (Kate's Place)' – a paean to his Harlem roots with the cut having a strong affinity to Gregory Porter's 'On My Way To Harlem'.

Allan has just released a new album and it's very different. For starters it's a live set – 'Live At Blue Llama', recorded in January of this year at the famed Ann Arbor jazz club. Then, where 'Kate's Soulfood' had a definite contemporary soul edge this live 10 tracker sees Allan doing what he does best – singing and playing straight ahead jazz at an intimate club packed with jazz devotees.

For the show the singer was backed by pianist/keyboardist Arcoiris Sandoval, bassist Marty Kenney, drummer Norman Edwards and saxophonist-flutist Irwin Hall and right from the start you can hear the honest, musical empathy between that band and Harris. That opener by the way is a version of Bobby Hebb's 'Sunny'. It's been covered so many times that it's now almost a standard but here Allan manages to offer fresh perspectives on the very familiar. Ditto the versions of 'Nature Boy' (here stretched out over to 11 minutes!) and a take on Oscar Brown Jr's ever-lovely 'Jeanine'. On this one Harris and the quartet deliver something totally different. The Brown original is jaunty but here the tempo's taken down to reflect the loss that the protagonist feels at losing the eponymous lady. The cut stretches to over six minutes effectively becoming a duet (or should we say duel?) between pianist Sandoval and Hall's frantic sax.

Amongst the other offerings is 'New Day' one of the key cuts on the aforementioned 'Kate's Soulfood'...catchy and melodic it serves as a reminder to dig out the parent long player! The other songs include a take on Nat King Cole's 'The Very Thought Of You' (a reminder that Allan's first live album was a Nat Cole tribute), a take on Miles Davis's 'So What' on which Allan offers his version of the famous vocalese of the Eddie Jefferson 1968 cover complete with the "walking off stage" episode! This live set's other cover is a gentle, building reading of Chick Corea/Al Jarreau's 'Spain'

ALLAN HARRIS; 'Live At Blue Llama' is out now via Love Productions Records in collaboration with Live at Blue LIAMA Records

Review: Noted jazz vocalist Harris release stunning live album recorded at Ann Arbor's Blue Llama

By Tom Henry / The Blade,
1 day ago

LIVE AT BLUE LLAMA JAZZ CLUB Allan Harris. Love Productions Records.



I have to admit the first thing that caught my attention about this album was the fact it was recorded at one of the region's premier venues, Ann Arbor's Blue Llama Jazz Club. That little tidbit aside, it didn't take long to fall in love with the recording itself, which is being released this Friday.

There are a lot of great things going on with this album, the first live recording Harris - known as the "Jazz Vocal King of New York" has issued in 13 years.

First, Allan Harris is every bit of an outstanding vocalist as one might believe from the moniker.

On this 10-song disc, drawn from two live performances at the Blue Llama in January, he performs classics such as "Sunny," "The Very Thought of You," "So What?" and "Spain" to go along with several fine originals, each performed with skillful and intriguing jazz rhythm and textures.

His band is stunning throughout, with some really hot solos by keyboardist [Arcoiris Sandoval](#), bassist Marty [Kenney](#), drummer Norman Edwards, Jr., and saxophonist Irwin Hall.

They really cut loose on the final song, "Nature Boy," the Eden [Ahbez](#) classic that the great Nat King Cole turned into a hit way back in 1948.

Consider this unbelievable short list of superstars who have covered "Nature Boy" since then, including Frank Sinatra, Miles Davis, Bobby Darin, George Benson, Peggy Lee, Celine Dion, Grace Slick, Aaron Neville, the Tony Bennett-Lady Gaga duet, and Cole's daughter, Natalie Cole.

Amazingly, Harris and his other four band members come up with an arrangement that has a cool, spicy vibe and is distinctive from past versions.

This is a great album recorded only about an hour from most of Toledo. Harris said in his liner notes there was minimal editing beyond some of the distracting audience sounds being filtered out and is "the way we performed it live with all the grit and glory."