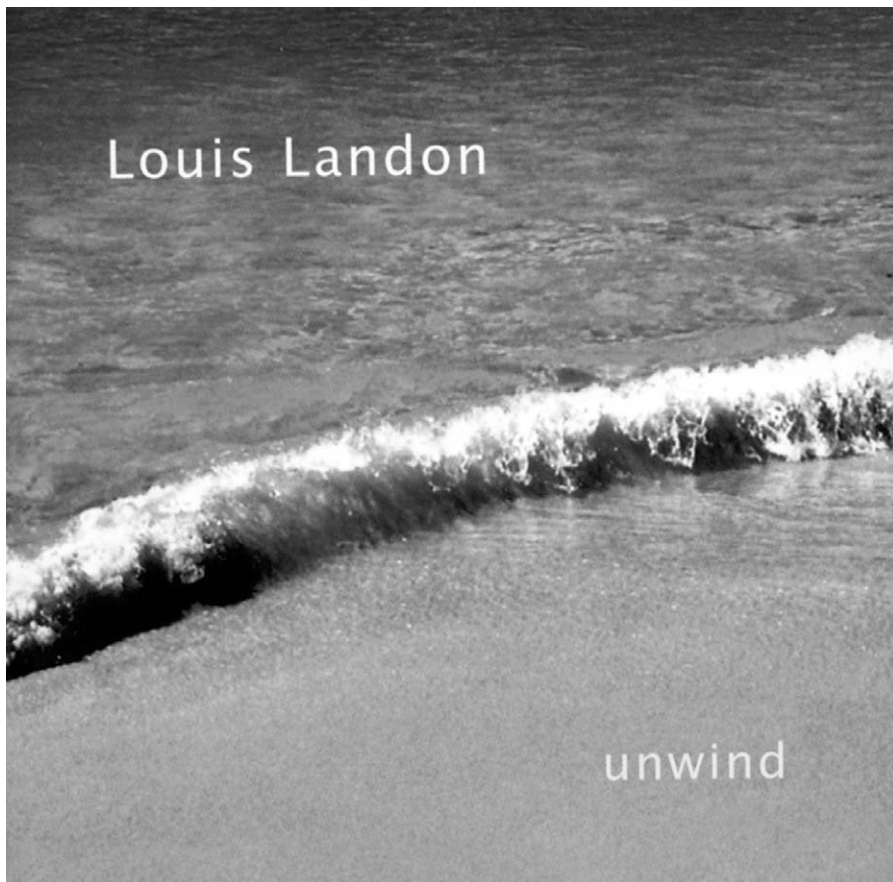


Artist

Louis Landon

by John Nelson



Multi-talented musician Louis Landon has come a long way in a short time. At 53, the accomplished pianist, singer and songwriter, who lives in Chestnut Ridge, has just released a new CD, “Unwind,” that is quickly growing in popularity, playing on almost 100 radio stations nationwide.

Landon will perform songs from his new album at 6:30 p.m. this Friday, March 3, at Pamela’s on the Hudson in Newburgh (845.562.4505). You can find his music on the Web at CDBaby, Amazon and iTunes. To find out more about him – he is also available to play house concerts – visit his Web site at www.louislandon.com.

John Nelson (JN): Describe your lifestyle and how it contributes to your process as an artist.

Louis Landon (LL): An aspect of my lifestyle that contributes most to my creativity as a composer and recording artist is the time I have alone. It is usually between the hours of noon and 3 p.m. during the week. That is the time that I have the house (and my piano) to myself and I can play and sing as loud as I want. I can practice things that would drive other people insane. I will sometimes repeat musical lines or songs over and over again. I can sing out the most nonsensical lyrics to a song I might be working on. Another way I get more alone time is by staying up late at night in my studio. I can work there while everyone else is sleeping. It is very difficult for me to create with anyone else listening. I also have to structure my own time and do things the way that I like to do them. I am fortunate, because a lot of what is called “my work” is play.

JN: When did you start playing piano? Did you know then that it would always be an important part of your life?

LL: I started playing piano when I was 4 years old. I didn’t know that music would be an important part of my life until I quit piano at age 13 and began playing guitar. I returned to the piano at 20, when it became clear to me that being a musician would be my life’s work.

JN: Who have been your musical influences and why?

LL: This is the first time that I am writing about my father as my first musical influence. He played piano and sang and did voices for cartoon characters, among so many other creative things in his life. But first and foremost, he was a musician. It’s because of him that there was a piano around in the first place. And he played it a lot. When I made the switch to guitar, my musical influences were Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, John Mayall, BB King and so many other rock and blues-oriented musicians. The turning point back to piano happened to me when I heard Chick Corea’s “Light as a Feather.” That album went right to my gut and I knew that I wanted to play jazz. It was at that point that I went back to piano and enrolled at Berklee College of Music. I studied with Charlie Banacas and Alan Pasqua. The pianists that I listened to were Bud Powell, Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner and Keith Jarrett. I think that if someone studied those four pianists, he would understand almost everything about jazz bebop and post bebop piano playing. All of them are exceptional musicians and piano players. Outside of pianists, I listened to Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Dizzy Gillespie, to name a few.

JN: Would you tell us about your new album, “unwind”?

LL: I was almost going to write about this in question No. 1, but I decided to go in a different direction. But going back to lifestyle, I found the process of writing and recording “unwind” a contrarian experience. I was playing a lot of gigs. I was teaching at Rockland Conservatory a few days a week. I

was a family man with two teenage daughters and a working wife. And I was working out at least five times a week to test for my black belt in Kyokoshin karate. With all that going on, I decided to record a solo piano CD after hearing the recorded sounds that Paul Hirsch was getting at Rose’s Lounge Studios. My intention was to record a jazz CD of original material that I had already written. However, every time I would start to play the music that I had brought in, things would slow down. Nothing up-tempo seemed to work. And it seemed that anything chromatic or any music with complex or dissonant chords wouldn’t work either. So, I had to throw out a lot of music. I ended up doing a lot of improvisation that was not in the bebop or jazz vocabulary. And I was leaving a lot of space between the notes. Some other kind of music was trying to come out and I needed to get out of the way and let it happen. What I ended up with was what two reviewers have called “New Age Jazz.” The few things that give the word jazz any validity is that some of the chords and chord voicings come from a jazz place. And there is improvisation. But the improvisation does not come out of the bebop tradition. It is melodic and simple. What the music turned out to be was my way of relaxing and getting away from the hectic life I was living. I needed to “unwind.” What is magical about the music is that when people hear it, they “get it.” They feel the relaxed quality of it and it relaxes them. The CD has been added to the playlists of 99 stations nationally for the month of February. It was just picked up by “Whisperings,” a solo piano Internet radio station on Live365 Internet radio that reaches more than 600,000 people monthly.

JN: How would you describe yourself as a performer? What kind of relationship do you have with the audience when you’re on stage?

LL: I perform differently as a singer/songwriter than as a solo concert pianist. When singing, I am more inclined to make eye contact with the audience. When I am playing solo piano, I usually pay more attention to the keyboard than the audience. In both cases above, I enjoy speaking to the audience. I tell them about who I am and what I’ve done, and I also tell them about how some of the music was created and who or what was the inspiration of a piece of music.

At left, Louis Landon started playing the piano at age 4. Above, Landon is also a photographer, having taken the ocean photo featured on the cover of his new CD, “Unwind.”

JN: From where do you derive your inspiration?

LL: Anything can be a source of inspiration. The key is to be open to it when it happens. If I am open emotionally and intellectually, good creativity results.

JN: What is your mission as an artist?

LL: To create a more emotional world by singing and playing music from the heart.

JN: What’s on the horizon for you?

LL: I am going to pursue this solo piano experience and see where it takes me. I also have a lot of songs that I am waiting to record. It will be interesting to see where this new CD takes me. I wish I could say that I have this music career thing all planned out, but I just keep writing, singing and playing, and hoping that more people appreciate what I do.

JN: Describe yourself in one word. Why that word?

LL: Lucky. Because I’ve managed to play and write music for most of my life and I love doing it. If I were to use two words, I would say blessed and cursed. Blessed for the same reason as lucky, and cursed because it is not an easy path to travel. The agony and the ecstasy.

JN: What is your personal definition of art?

LL: The intentional creation of something that transmits thoughts and/or feelings. Bach and Rembrandt have created the highest form of art/music. They transmit both highly evolved emotions and thought into their works. I remember staring into the eyes of a Rembrandt self-portrait at the Frick museum, and it was as if Rembrandt himself was there staring at me. And with his knowing eyes he was telling me that he understood the meaning of life and I understood that he put that into the painting. Pure genius. It was an amazing experience. With paint and canvas he was able to create something that is still communicating higher knowledge, in an intellectual and emotional way, hundreds of years after his death. ◉