

In High Demand: Vocalist Layonne Holmes



By Chris Spiewak

Demand is a powerful word, whether used as a verb or a noun. The word “demand” can also have the word “pressure” associated with it, especially in a studio or concert setting. For a certain Jersey shore vocalist, the words “demand” and “pressure” apply, but they do not seem to intimidate.

Ms. Layonne Holmes is someone who, quite confidently and professionally, brings years of experience and magic to every project, whether headlining as part of one of her regular acts, or as a guest to the stars of the music world. Her unparalleled versatility across so many music genres makes her one of the most sought-after singers in New Jersey.

For Holmes, musical talent in the family runs deep, going back at least three generations. Her great aunt sang jazz music at the Apollo Theater in the company of Ella Fitzgerald, and her grandmother was choir director in their church. Delores Holmes, Layonne’s mother and affectionately known as Miss Dee, was a member of the Bruce Springsteen Band in the early 1970s; this was the period after Steel Mill, and just before the E Street Band officially began.

Layonne Holmes performs with the Matt O’Ree Band in Fair Haven.

Delores later brought Layonne to recording sessions and band rehearsals, and the two even sang together as Layonne progressed through her teen years. In fact, Layonne’s first ever paycheck was earned as mother and daughter supplied background vocals for the late Bill Chinnock, who was recording in the home studio of late E Street keyboardist Danny Federici at the time. As impressed as she was with the money, Holmes still chose college to earn her business administration degree in case music didn’t pan out.

In 1993, Tim McLoone started putting together his now-popular Holiday Express group, and he enlisted Holmes and her mother to help spread holiday cheer and raise money for those less privileged. That meeting has led to a 22-year music relationship between McLoone and Holmes, who has been a singer

with Tim McLoone & The Shirleys (along with her mom, Amy Broza and Maureen McCrink) since the group's inception in 1999.

One of Holmes' proudest moments came about as a result of our country's darkest hour: the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York City. The "Tribute to Heroes Telethon" featured the biggest acts in music and entertainment. Bruce Springsteen, set to open the show, reached out to Delores Holmes after so many years apart, and she and Layonne accompanied several E Street members on backing vocals on the as-yet unreleased song "City Of Ruins." Layonne recalls the mood as "palpable," and an event that will always have a special place in her heart.

As the years marched on, Holmes got busier with her music. Forming the group RAIN with mom and Debbie Vaughn, the ladies performed an interesting fusion of soul, jazz, R&B and gospel music. Unfortunately, in 2010, Holmes lost her mother, who was her favorite bandmate and best friend. Intent on continuing her career and her mother's legacy, Holmes surrounded herself with A-list musicians and set out to create music that would have people coming back for more.

An increasing interest in jazz music led Holmes to create The New Standard jazz quintet, which still performs on a limited schedule to this day. In 2011, Holmes and renowned bassist Gerald Carboy formed the Motor City Revue, an 11-piece band that is the closest thing to Motown since, well, Motown itself. This group is eerily authentic to the original sounds of Smokey Robinson, The Supremes and many others. "Sold Out" is a common result for Motor City Revue shows, and with good reason. Holmes also performs frequently with the fabulous Lisa Sherman, and with legendary shore musician Bobby Bandiera, both at his Rock & Soul Review shows, and his HOPE concerts every December at the Count Basie Theatre. Everyone should search YouTube for 'Hope concert 2015', and select the 'Bad Medicine' video, with Holmes and Jon Bon Jovi in a spectacular, high energy performance. This, my friends, is what real, authentic, homegrown Jersey music is all about. She also has been featured recently at the shows of Bon Jovi guitarist Matt O'Ree and his local band, revealing her talent and true love for rock music.

And was it mentioned how Layonne Holmes is the nicest and most down-to-earth person on the planet? Yes, it's true; chat her up at an upcoming show (www.layonne.com), and you'll easily realize why she's in such high demand.

Chris Spiewak is currently the bassist for rock/blues cover band VyntEdge