

# Jewish Life



Maria Lukofsky

FOOD

BOOKS

TRAVEL

MUSIC

WHAT'S NEW

**RUTH SCHWEITZER**  
SPECIAL TO THE CJN

**M**arla Lukofsky blazed the trail for women in the male-dominated field of standup comedy and now she's reinvented herself as a serious jazz singer.

Ironically, it was through music that Lukofsky got into comedy. The manager of the Riverboat coffee house, where she appeared as a folksinger in the early 1970s, saw she was getting a lot of laughs for her between-song banter and told her about a comedy night at a nearby club.

Her 30-year standup career, which included appearances in every major city in Canada and the United States and on radio and television, ended when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, but she still makes the odd guest appearance.

Last July, Lukofsky launched her career as a professional jazz singer at the 120 Diner, a Toronto club booked by jazz singer Ori Dagan. A chance meeting with singer Ilana Walston, at a cancer fundraiser where Lukofsky was the keynote speaker, was the spark for Lukofsky's new career.

Walston suggested that Lukofsky sing at Lisa Particelli's Girls Night Out, an event that's currently held at two Toronto clubs. "I went up on stage with a great trio and I made people laugh and they said, 'You gotta come back,'" Lukofsky said. She then built a repertoire of uncommon jazz standards.

Lukofsky, whose voice has been compared to Blossom Dearie's, likes to sing songs that tell a story. Her sets includes mild humour, in the form of banter and song introductions.

"That works for me because it answers to every aspect of my performing personality. I only pick songs that resonate with my life, my feelings," Lukofsky said. One of her favourite songs is Alec Wilder's *I'll Be Around*, "the story of ex-lovers who are always around for their ex-lovers," she said. "Even though they were dumped, they're always around for the person that dumped them. And I've been in that boat, too, and still am."

Lukofsky's full-time career in standup ended in 1998 when she was living in Los Angeles and found a lump in her breast. After her treatment, she wrote a yet-to-be-published memoir about surviving cancer.

"I thought it was very important for

people to read a true account, not an upbeat, positive account. There are oodles of books like that. That doesn't help a lot of people. A lot of people like me need to know what they're going to face and what it may feel like," she said.

Lukofsky went on to become an inspirational speaker for cancer, addressing audiences across North America in her one-woman show, *I'm Still Here... and So Is My Hair*.

Looking back on the 30 years she spent as a standup comedian, Lukofsky remembers the good and the bad. She was able to make a living and she often basked in the spotlight. "When the audience loved me, everything else fell by the wayside and I didn't care about anything," she said.

But standup comedy was a man's game then, and many male comics and some club owners gave her a hard time. Since then, some comedians have apologized to her, acknowledging they put her "through the ringer," she said.

Lukofsky is happy to see more women in standup these days, but she's troubled by the fact that they are unaware of the women who paved the way for them. Standing in the wings of Yuk Yuk's Richmond Street location in Toronto, she said she once gave a new, young female comedian encouragement. "And she doesn't know who I am, and I look up on the wall and there's an article about me and I say, 'This is who I am.' A lot of people in Canada don't think about the history of the field they're in," she reflected.

Lukofsky is still friends with some of her buddies from her standup days. One of them, Bruce Bell, who watched her sing, told her, "You were born with a microphone in your hand, honey. You were meant to talk to an audience and you were meant to sing."

Lukofsky, accompanied by guitarist Nathan Hiltz, bassist Artie Roth and drummer Glenn Anderson, performs at 7 p.m. on June 26 at the Relish Bar and Grill (PWYC), as part of the TD Toronto Jazz Festival. ■

For more information, visit <http://torontojazz.com>.

For information about Girls Night Out, visit [www.girlsnightoutjazz.com](http://www.girlsnightoutjazz.com). For more information about Lukofsky, visit [www.marlalukofsky.com](http://www.marlalukofsky.com) or her Facebook page.

## Comic reinvents herself as jazz singer

