

**The**

**PIANO**

**of**

**LORRAINE GELLER**

Solographer: Jan Evensmo  
Last update: June 12, July 7, 2023

Born: Portland, Oregon, Sept. 11, 1928  
Died: Los Angeles, California, Oct. 13, 1958

*Introduction:*

Oslo Jazz Circle discovered Lorraine Geller through her fine record sessions with her husband Herb Geller, a favourite of ours, playing in Europe for years. Her early death was a true tragedy.

*History:*

Born Lorraine Winifred Walsh, married to alto saxophonist Herb Geller (1952). Started out with the all-female bigband Sweethearts of Rhythm, based in New York. Arrived with Herb to LA, where they played with many musicians in the West Coast jazz scene, such as Shorty Rogers, Zoot Sims, Stan Getz, Red Mitchell; she also did sessions with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. In 1957 she accompanied Kay Starr. The following year she concentrated on bringing up her daughter, so she did not often perform, but she did play at the first Monterey Jazz Festival. Died from an unexpected heart ailment (no connection to drugs). (ref. Wikipedia).

## LORRAINE GELLER SOLOGRAPHY

**SHORTY ROGERS & HIS BIG BAND Balboa Beach, Ca. July 11, 1953**

Collective personnel: Shorty Rogers, Conrad Gozzo, Maynard Ferguson (tp), Bob Enevoldsen, Bob Edmondson, Herbie Harper (tb), Herb Geller (as), Jack Montrose, Bill Perkins (ts), Bill Holman (ts, bar), Lorraine Geller (p), John Simmons (b), Chuck Flores (dm).

Fifteen titles recorded live at Rendezvous Ballroom, all have LG's piano:

Sometimes I'm Happy	Acc. (tp). (M)
How High The Moon	Intro 4 bars. Acc.. Solo 32 bars. (FM)
Short Snort (Stop)	Intro. Acc.. With ens. Soli 48 and 48 bars. (FM)
Take The A Train	Intro 6 bars. With ens. (M)
C Jam Blues	Intro 24 bars. With ens. Acc.. Solo 48 bars. Straight 24 bars. (FM)
The Great Lie	Intro 32 bars. Solo 16 bars. With ens. (M)
Buzzy	Intro 6 bars. With ens. Solo 36 bars. (FM)
Popo	Solo 36 bars. Acc. (b). (FM)
Infinity Promenade	Solo 8 bars. (M)
3 Cents Plain	Solo 8 bars. (FM)
I May Be Wrong	Soli 32 and 16 bars. (M)
Contours	Acc. (tb/as). (S)
Perdido	Intro 8 bars. Solo 64 bars. (FM)
Nice Work If You Can Get It	Acc. (tp). (M)
Why Shouldn't I?	With ens. (S)

Believe it or not, but LG seems to be the leading musician here! Her comping is heard all through, she has several orchestral parts, and she takes several long piano soli of excellent quality! Her hard unwomanlike piano style, if I dare say it like that, penetrates the whole evening. The pleasure is influenced by a not too good recording quality, but in most cases her soli can be enjoyed. "Perdido" is a good example, and there are several blues items here; "C Jam ...", "Short ...", "Buzzy", "Popo" where she seems to enjoy herself very much. Noting that there are also many other fine musicians soloing here, this date deserves attention!

**HERB GELLER QUARTET LA. Aug. 5, 1953**

Herb Geller (as), Lorraine Geller (p), John Simmons (b), Roy Harte (dm).

Postscript of July 7, 2023: Date earlier falsely given as July 4, 1953.

Four titles were recorded for Imperial:

2:51	It's Swell Of You	Solo 36 bars. (M)
4:06	Mad About The Boy	Intro 4 bars. Acc. (as). Solo 8 bars. (S)
2:42	Everything I Have Belongs To You	Solo 56 bars. (F)
2:43	I Feel Like A Feather In The Breeze	Solo 32 bars. (FM)

Lorraine Geller had the reputation of being one of the best bebop pianists on the West Coast, and her first recording session seems to confirm this. She plays "Everything ..." in fast tempo with great confidence, and also "... Swell ..." and "... The Breeze" show that this 25 years old lady is highly professional in her art. On "... The Boy" she shows also her romantic talents. Not unexpectedly she makes her debut with her husband, with which she later should make some of her most important works.

**MILES DAVIS & THE LIGHTHOUSE ALL STARS Hermosa Beach, Ca., Sept. 13, 1953**

Collective personnel: Miles Davis, Rolf Ericson (tp), Bud Shank (as, bar), Bob Cooper (ts), Lorraine Geller (p), Howard Rumsey (b), Max Roach (dm).

Four titles were recorded live at The Lighthouse, three issued:

Infinite Promenade	With ens. Acc.. Solo 64 bars. (M)
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A Night In Tunisia With ens. Acc.. Solo 64 bars. (M)  
 'Round Midnight Acc. (tp-MD). (S)

The piano is positioned such that LG's comping is heard quite prominently through the session, interesting! Particularly her cowork with Miles on "... Midnight" is worth noticing, just too bad that she did not get a solo here, because she is obviously active and inspired on this date, and her solo on "... Tunisia" shows her originality.

**LORRAINE GELLER TRIO**

**LA. 1954**

Lorraine Geller (p, comp \*), Leroy Vinnegar (b), Eldridge "Bruz" Freeman (dm).  
 Ten titles were issued on Dot:

2:21*	Madame X	(F)
2:50	Gee Baby, Ain't I Good To You	(S)
3:14	You And The Night And The Music	(FM)
3:21	Poinciana	(S)
2:55	What A Difference A Day Made	(FM)
3:11*	Clash By Night	(F)
5:16	Close Your Eyes	(S)
4:06*	Mystery Theater	(M)
2:08	The Blue Room	(FM)
3:23*	Everybody's Blues	(M)

When stated above that her most important sessions were made with her husband, there is one exception, this trio session! The CD liner notes states that it was not intended to be a recording but the first rehearsal of a new group along with some demo material (ref. Herb Geller). The music was released on Dot Records four years after her death. There is so much freedom in her music here, she has a true confidence in what she is doing, with firm roots in the bebop tradition, as evident in "Clash ..." or "Mystery ..." or "... X", and she treats some evergreens with great ease and personality. Should a highlight needed to be pointed out, the beautiful slow "... Your Eyes" ranks high! A session like this is enough to make the performer candidate for a solography!!

**HERB GELLER QUARTET**

**LA. Aug. 6&9, 1954**

Herb Geller (as), Lorraine Geller (p), Curtis Counce (b), Lawrence Marable (dm).  
 Eight titles were recorded for EmArcy:

10874	You Stepped Out Of A Dream	Break to solo 64 bars. (F)
10875	Kahagon	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
10876	Breaking Through The Sound Barrier	Intro. Solo 64 bars. (F)
10877	Happy Go Lucky	Solo 36 bars. (FM)
10881	A Room With A View	Solo 32 bars. (M)
10882	Sleigh Ride	Intro. Solo 16 bars. (F)
10883	Silver Rain	Acc. (as). (SM)
10884	Alone Together	Intro. Solo 64 bars. (M)

The quartet sessions are mostly structured with a very collective introduction, then soloing first by him then by her, to finish collectively. The tempo here is mainly quite high, and the music is strong and hard, no softness, except on "... Rain" which is a solo feature for altosax. Play "... Dream" and "... Sound Barrier", both in very fast tempo and be amazed by this fascinating and dedicated piano playing which certainly has some roots in Bud. All items here have something to say, but one highlight to be particularly mentioned is "... Together".

**LEONARD FEATHER ORCHESTRA**

**LA. Dec. 31, 1954**

Harry Edison (tp), Bob Enevoldsen (vtb, ts), Herb Geller (as), Lorraine Geller (p), Joe Mondragon (b), Larry Bunker (dm).  
 Four titles were recorded for Blue Note:

4:29	Arcadia	Intro 8 bars. Solo 32 bars. (M)
4:30	Santa Anita	Solo 36 bars. (FM)
3:32	Hooray For Hollywood	Solo 64 bars. (F)

4:29 Blindfold Test No. 3 Solo 12 bars. Acc. (b) 12 bars. (M)

Fine sextet session with blowing space for everybody, and LG is in very fine shape. The highlight is the very fast "... Hollywood" where she is the first soloist, what a lady!

### THE GELLERS

**LA. April 20-26, 1955**

Herb Geller (as-except "Patterns", "Love ..."), Lorraine Geller (p, comp \*), Red Mitchell (b), Mel Lewis (dm).

Thirteen titles were recorded for EmArcy:

3:03	If I Were A Bell	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
4:54	Bewitched, Bothered And Bewildered	Acc. (as). Solo 16 bars. (S)
3:47	The Answer Man	Soli 64, 4 and 4 bars. (FM)
3:57	Cherokee	Solo 2 choruses of 64 bars. 32 bars 4/4 with (dm/as). (F)
2:51	The Heather On The Hill	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
5:07	Supper Time	Intro 4 bars. Solo 24 bars. (SM)
3:14	I've Got A Feeling I'm Falling	Solo 64 bars. (F)
2:48*	Patterns	Soli/straight 60 and 16 bars. (M)
5:19	Two Of A Kind	Intro. Acc. (as). Solo 16 bars. (S)
3:07	Love, You Magic Spell	Solo/straight feature. (FM/S)
3:59	Arapahoe / Cherokee	Solo 2 choruses of 64 bars. 64 bars 4/4 with (dm/as). (F)
4:58	Come Rain Or Come Shine	Solo 32 bars. (M)
5:15	Blues In The Night	Soli 16 and 24 bars. (SM)

Note: Tom Lord indicates that there are two versions of "Blues In The Night", one only issued in Japan, please confirm! Note also that "Cherokee" and "Arapahoe" are supposed to be recorded at two different days, but they are so much like two takes as you can get them.

Another excellent quartet session with new bass and drums. The Gellers are, not surprisingly, very well coordinated, and it is a pleasure to listen to her comping. Her soloing is, as said before, mostly hard and persistent, and quite original. She enjoys obviously high tempi, and spend some time with the flashing "Cherokee"s and "... Falling", the latter one of the highlights, amazing! She swings casually along on "The Heather ...", "Supper ..." and "Come Rain ...". And she can when she wants to; the slow "Bewitched ..." and "... Kind" show her lyrical side. Finally, note the two trio items, particularly "... Spell" is full of drama!! This session gives in a large nutshell important insight into the art of this fine but almost forgotten artist.

### HERB GELLER SEXTET

**LA. Aug. 19, 1955**

Conte Candoli (tp), Herb Geller (as), Mel "Ziggy" Vines (ts), Lorraine Geller (p), Red Mitchell (b), Lawrence Marable (dm).

Four titles were recorded for EmArcy:

4:24	Outpost Incident	Solo 32 bars. (M)
5:00	Rockin' Chair	Solo 32 bars. (M)
3:08	You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To	Acc. only. (S)
5:28	Crazy He Calls Me	Acc. only. (S)

**LA. Aug. 22, 1955**

Personnel as above except Leroy Vinnegar (b) replaces Mitchell.

Four titles:

4:25	Owl Eyes	Solo 24 bars. (M)
3:43	Gin For Fluegelhorns	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
4:34	Tardi At Zardi's	Acc. only. (F)
5:31	Vone Mae	Solo 32 bars. (M)

This is the kind of sextet session we all enjoy, with great musicians taking their inspired soli, including Red Mitchell and Leroy Vinnegar on the bass! LG is easy

to recognize with her typical compressed style on five of the eight items. They are all very interesting, with the bluesy “Owl ...” and the groovy “... Mae” as the highlights.

**HERB GELLER QUARTET****LA. Aug. 24, 1955**

Herb Geller (as), Lorraine Geller (p, comp \*), Leroy Vinnegar (b), Bruz Freeman (dm).

Four titles were recorded for EmArcy:

3:23*	Days I Never Knew	Solo 64 bars. (FM)
3:30*	Domestic Harmony	Acc. (as). (SM)
2:59	Love Is Like A Turtle	Solo 64 bars. (F)
5:48	Sweet Vinnegar	Solo 36 bars. (SM)

The last quartet session with two LG originals, and it strikes me that she turns all soloing on “Domestic Harmony” over to her husband, does that mean anything? Four quite different tunes here, and all have high qualities, not so hard as in the first session, whether the charming “... Vinnegar”, her own inventive “... Knew” or the very fast “... Turtle”.

**MAYNARD FERGUSON****LA. Aug. 26/27, 1955**

Maynard Ferguson (tp, btp, vtb), Conte Candoli (tp), Milt Bernhart (tb), Herb Geller (as), Nino Tempo (ts), Bob Gordon (bar), Lorraine Geller (p), Red Mitchell (b), Gary Frommer (dm).

Note: Some sources giv Ian Bernard (p) here.

Four titles were recorded for EmArcy, one has (p):

12017	Slow Stroll	Intro 4 bars. (M)
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**MAYNARD FERGUSON****LA. Nov. 7&10, 1955**

Bigband personnel including Lorraine Geller (p), Ray Brown (b).

Eight titles were recorded for EmArcy, five have LG:

12370	The Roamin' Showman	Solo 16 bars. (SM)
12373	Wild Man	Solo 28 bars. (FM)
12387	Dancing Nitely	Solo 16 bars. (F)
12389	Idyll	Straight/ens. (FM)
12390	Well Hardly Ever	Intro 4 bars. Straight 8 bars. (M)

**LA. May 7&12, 1956**

Personnel as above except Buddy Clark (b) replaces Ray Brown.

Four titles, three have LG:

12926	Dreamboat	Intro 8 bars. Solo with orch 34 bars. (M)
12928	Miss Pitlack Regrets	Intro 4 bars. (SM)
12947	Pork Pie	Intro. (SM)

Excellent bigband sessions and LG gets her share of solo opportunities, note in particular “Wild Man” and “... Nitely”.

**MAYNARD FERGUSON****1956**

Bigband personnel including Lorraine Geller (p).

Postscript of July 7, 2023 (ref. Noal Cohen/Mark Cantor):

Film “Swingin' And Singin'”, variety show film, ca. 15 minutes, YouTube, one (p)-solo:

	Unidentified Tune	Solo 8 bars. (M)
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**RED MITCHELL QUARTET****LA. Feb. 18, 1957**

Personnel as below.

Three titles were recorded at KABC-TV “Stars of “Jazz” Show:

2:48	It's Allright With Me	Solo 32 bars. (F)
3:17	I Thought Of You	Acc. (b). Solo 16 bars. (S)
2:38	Paul's Pal	Solo 16 bars. (M)

**LA. March 26, 1957**

James Clay (fl, ts), Lorraine Geller (p), Red Mitchell (b), Billy Higgins (dm).

Seven titles were recorded for Contemporary:

5:27	Scrapple From The Apple	Solo 64 bars. 64 bars 4/4 with (ts/b). (F)
5:15	Rainy Night	Solo 24 bars. 24 bars 4/4 with (b). (M)
4:52	I Thought Of You	Acc. (b). Solo 16 bars. (S)
6:19	Out Of The Blue	Solo 64 bars. (FM)
7:02	Paul's Pal	Solo 64 bars. (M)
5:36	Sandu	Acc. (ts). Solo 24 bars. (SM)
8:09	Cheek To Cheek	Acc. (ts). Solo 72 bars. (F)

This is one of LG's greatest sessions (with a TV program as a kind of rehearsal), and it is just so tragic that she passed away so unexpectedly and so early. The basics are there with the leader doing a magnificent job on the bass and with perfect drumming. The tenorsax has still a long way to go, but when LG is soloing, she has what she needs behind her, and wow what a session!! In fact, she swings more here than anytime before, and how could she do otherwise with Red Mitchell!? Could she also feel more free without her husband present, I just ask!? All of these items have remarkable piano playing, and I cannot but be particularly enthusiastic when listening to her uptempo soloing on "Scrapple ...", "... Blue" and "Cheek ..." (and how she comps tenorsax on the latter!). Or dig her opening phrase on the great "... Pal"! Or anything here!! A great lady!!!

No further recording sessions.

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