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# BLUES

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## SUE PALMER

San Diego's Queen of Boogie Woogie

All About the  
**Los Angeles Blues Society**

NAMM Show, DVD & CD Reviews

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# Sue Palmer

## *San Diego's Queen of Boogie Woogie*

Thirty years in the music industry is a long time for any performer, particularly for blues artists and especially for women blues performers. For Sue Palmer, the "Queen of Boogie Woogie," it's been a star-studded blues career with many rewards and awards. The swing, blues and boogie-woogie piano player has toured the world and played music festivals throughout the U.S. and Europe as the pianist for blues diva Candye Kane. But it's her solo and band recording as Sue Palmer and Her Motel Swing Orchestra that have generated the most awards. Her fourth release, *Sophisticated Lady* won an International Blues Challenge Award for "Best Self Produced CD" in 2008, her third release, *Live at Dizzy's* won "Best Blues Album 2002/2003" and her solo piano album, *Sue Palmer After Hours* won "Best Blues Album 2010" from the San Diego Music Awards.

The San Diego native even had a day named for her by the San Diego City Council: March 25th, 2008 was officially declared "Sue Palmer Day" for her many years of cultural contributions playing the city's festivals, clubs and celebrations. Following her most recent award in 2010, Sue received the "Jim Croce Music Award" for excellence and dedication to music from the late recording artist's widow, Ingrid Croce, owner of San Diego's jazz/



Photo: Annie Libby

blues club Croce's Bar and Restaurant.

"They call me the "Queen of Boogie Woogie" says Sue, speaking about her career. As far as the future, I'd like to take that title as far as I can."

Sue got started in music early. She was born into a musical family which encouraged her to express herself through music. Her early role models were her musical aunts: a saxophonist and piano player and her mother who played percussion. Says Sue, "It was kind of required to participate musically; that's what we did when we got together."

Later, her role models included swinging blues and boogie woogie recording artists Hadda Brooks, Julia Lee, and Camille Howard along with Elvis Presley, Ray Charles, Count Basie and Duke Ellington.

After graduating high school, she became politically active in the Women's Movement where she was able to showcase her talents playing at local meetings and events. Playing in small venues allowed her to develop her own style and exposed her to many other talented performers who mentored her along the way.

Sue's first professional band was in Tobacco Road, a band she formed with well known jazz and swing bass player Preston Coleman. Over the next 15 years, the band played regular gigs at the Belly Up Tavern in Solano Beach. Of Coleman she says, "Working with Preston was like going to college to learn my craft. He was the real thing – a man who was a fantastic performer and arranger and was kind and generous with us."

While fronting Tobacco Road, Sue met Candye Kane and soon after the two began collaborating on music. Later, Sue was invited to join Kane's band as piano player which led to world tours through the '90s playing club dates and festivals in Canada, Australia, France, Holland, the Netherlands and United States.

Sue was known, during these years, for her memorable get-up: a two foot high beehive hairdo, retro shades and piles of rings and bracelets that jangled as she played her lightening fast keyboard. Their act was so popular, the band averaged 250 dates per year. While it was an exhilarating experience for her as a musician, it was also very draining so in 1999, Sue decided to leave the band.

"It was hard to be away from friends and significant others," she recall, "especially because we didn't have Internet and it was really expensive making phone calls."

Eventually, I quit because I was just tired of being on the road so much."

Back in San Diego Sue launched her own band in 2000, "Sue Palmer and Her Motel Swing Orchestra" and over the past decade has performed regularly at Croce's in San Diego as well as the Sacramento Jazz Jubilee, the Glendale Kiwanis Jazz Festival, the Mammoth Jazz Festival, the Ocean Beach Jazz Festival and the Adams Avenue Street Fair to rave reviews.

In addition, she has collaborated with a number of recording artists. She's featured on Tom Waits' compilation, *New Coat of Paint* (Manifesto Records, 2000), Earl Thomas' *The Elector Studio Sessions* (2000); Michele Lundeen's self produced, *Song Inside Me* (2004), produced and contributed to Dayna Carroll's CD *Yesterday, Today, Forever* (2008), and produced the late, award-winning songwriter Janell Rock's CD, *Janell Rock, Performer*. She's also appeared on stage or recorded with Lou Ann Barton, Sue Foley, Kim Wilson, Walter Wolfman Washington and Marcia Ball, to name a few.

In addition to writing new music for her five, independent releases, Sue has continued to write and perform with Candye Kane. Her latest role is as musical director for Kane's new biographical music show, *Toughest Girl Alive*, for which she wrote "Highway of Tears," one of the featured songs. Based on Kane's life's experiences, the show features music, multimedia and gorgeous set design highlighting Kane's colorful memoirs.

The show opened in January and runs until February 6, 2011 at the Moxie Theater in San Diego.

Sue has also performed as part of the show "Queens of Boogie Woogie" with piano players/singers Lisa Otey, Dona Oxford and Wendy Dewitt at Berkeley, CA's Freight & Salvage and the 2010 Ocean Beach Jazz Festival. But the most special show was in 2002 with the late, original Queen of Boogie Woogie, singer-songwriter-pianist Hadda Brooks who died later that year. Sue will, again, join the Queens of Boogie Woogie for a show at Yoshi's in Oakland on April 25, 2011.

For the present, Sue enjoys her role as band leader with Sue Palmer and Her Motel Swing Orchestra. The band's line up includes lead singer Deeja Marie; trombone player April West; drummer Sharon Shufelt; guitarist Steve Wilcox, sax player Jonny Viau and bass player Pete Harrison, with Sue on piano and accordion.

In February, the band performs in the series "Terminal Jazz" at San Diego Airport's baggage section, in May, they appear at Vista's Avo Theater as well as shows at Croce's. In June, Sue travels to Europe with Candye Kane to perform at the Netherlands' United by Music charity event followed by club dates and festivals in Europe.

An active supporter of the Gay Rights movement, Sue has received two Nicky Awards for "Outstanding Entertainer."

For more information, please visit: [www.suepalmer.com](http://www.suepalmer.com).

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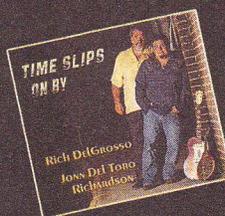
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