



## Key Notes On Fredrick Levore

**Unlike any other room in his house,** singer Fredrick Levore's music alcove is Opera House red, hinting at his passion for his craft. Compact disks, vinyl albums and music books line the walls, and his formidable stereo equipment, wired to speakers the size of steamer trunks. They emit a lush landscape of sound. His CD collection includes many of his favorites, including Nat King Cole, Billy Eckstine and Carmen McRae, and yet, crosses many categories, from Brahms to James Brown, and from Audra

McDonald to Michael McDonald. On his kitchen table is a copy of Jazz Times, open to an article on the 10 Most Underrated Guitarists, which he's been reading with a yellow highlighter, underscoring passages on their styles and their musical origins.

## On The Scene

**Fredrick turns the volume down** on the late Canadian songstress Eve Cassidy to reflect on his own burgeoning career as a singer. A performer who has graced such New York City clubs as Cleopatra's Needle, The Blue Note and Don't Tell Mama's, he's been honing his craft for more than a decade and tends toward standards that tell stories. "It's like painting a picture for someone to look at," he says. Unlike a song whose strongest feature is its hook, he adds, "A story has a destination; you're not just repeating something." In 1991, he began studying his craft with Metropolitan Opera Singer John Albert Harris, and from 1993 to present the consummate technician George Axiltee. It's not enough to simply know how the voice works or even to train it, Fredrick notes, one must explore and mine the terrain of the material, which is why he takes performance classes at HB Studio, and asks himself such questions as, "What is going on in this song? What are the emotional transitions?" He strives for fresh interpretations of familiar songs.

When he was just starting out, he took advantage of "open mikes" at clubs around the city, and then graduated to scheduled engagements, where he hires the musicians, selects the songs and customizes the arrangements. In 1997, the growth he'd achieved was evident, and led to a weekly gig at the Café San Marco in New York City's famed Greenwich Village. A CD he recorded the following year drew judges' raves in the Thelonius Monk Jazz Competition.

# The Early Years

**Though he was raised in the church**, the son of a Baptist minister, the artist recalls, “I didn’t grow up singing in church.” Sometimes, though, he would lend his voice to the choir. Contrary to his vast current music collection, as a child, Fredrick and family only listened to gospel and other sacred music. But they are a musical bunch: His father often sang in church, while one brother played drums, another piano and bass, and, early on, Fredrick studied saxophone and piano. At five years old, he performed at Carnegie Hall with older girl cousins; together they were Guy and Dolls. Practicing music as well as the rebellious nature of the teen years, eventually took him and his brothers in a variety of directions and into a multitude of genres.

It was not until Fredrick was a teenager that he bought his first two albums-both by bands, Tower of Power, famous for their burning horn section, and Earth, Wind & Fire, who married driving grooves with metaphysical lyrics. He also began to play sax in local bands, which didn’t go over great at home, but gave him his first taste of the joy of sharing music with an audience. In recent years, Fredrick has taken up the guitar, in part for its portability. “It’s self-contained,” he explains, and then adds, “and you can be closer to the audience.” It’s also gives him another handy tool on which to compose.

## About The Music

**There are so many songs to sing.** But so many songs that have already been cemented in people’s minds as standards that go only one way. Fredrick enjoys striking out in new directions. For example, the classic “God Bless The Child,” is often delivered with a whoa-is-me timber, but when Fredrick performed it recently, he brought to the song the stoic wisdom of a man who has learned a hard, but necessary lesson. It held more of a “let me give you a piece of advice, because I’ve lived through it” interpretation.

Fredrick examines songs to see what other stories they might be telling other than the obvious, to see what other messages are locked inside like the sound of the shore in a seashell. As he looks ahead, he ponders moving away, if only a short distance, from the standards, to explore more modern-day storytellers like James Taylor, Carole King and Brenda Russell. He points to singer Cassandra Wilson taking a ‘70s pop, mid-tempo groove, “Children Of The Night,” by the Jones Girls, and shifting the pacing of the songs, bringing more Mediterranean spice to it.

Carnegie Hall is the home of innovators. Fredrick started out there at five years old, and with his own dash of magic, he plans to return. — *Pamala Johnson* ©2003