



# ALDORA BRITAIN RECORDS

The Global Independent & Underground Music E-Zine  
Issue 298, Tuesday 11th February 2025  
“Tomorrow’s Music Today”

FEATURING THE SOUNDS OF...  
Kent Nielsen, Lili Anel, and  
Stuffed Foxes!

Live Spotlight: RICHARD HAWLEY  
with John Smith at De Montfort Hall,  
Leicester, England!

Also... The Top 10 Most Influential Records  
of the 1990s, as voted for by our featured  
artists!

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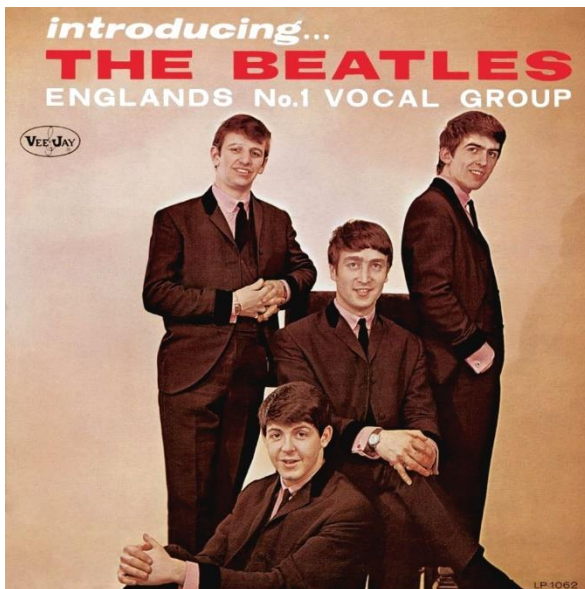
(Pictured artist: Lili Anel)

# Swim at Your Own Risk

The roots music of the United States has an undeniably enduring and multi-cultural foundation and appeal. The magical realms of pop, rock, folk, jazz, soul, blues, it is a wondrous place to be. And this is exactly where modern-day singer-songwriter and musician **Lili Anel** makes her home. Her fantastically relatable melting pot of sound has recently been captured exquisitely on a quintessential album offering, the sublime *You Have a Visitor*, a collection that shuffles, sways and shakes with a charming, warm, direct appeal. It is a perfect example of Lili's approach to songcraft and her collaborative nature, from opener 'Fairy Tales' to the final notes. With *You Have a Visitor* only just released into the world, Lili took a brief respite to chat with *Aldora Britain Records* about her life in story and song to date. We discussed popular original compositions from her back-catalogue, her growth and evolution as an artist over time, current big influences and inspirations, and much, much more. That exclusive in-depth conversation is published here in full for the very first time.

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**Aldora Britain Records:** Hello Lili, how are you? I am excited to be talking with such a fantastic artist based over in Philadelphia. It is amazing how music can bring us together. Let's start off by travelling back in time. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what was it that first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

**Lili Anel:** I was born in Harlem, New York City. My family lived in a building above a record store. My earliest memories are hearing music coming up from the floor beneath me. I remember singing along with some of the songs. The record store sold Latin music records. Very rhythmic and very melodic. Music always played in our home, whether it was the traditional music of Cuba, Afro-Cuban drum driven records, call-and-response chants, or jazz. No doubt always hearing

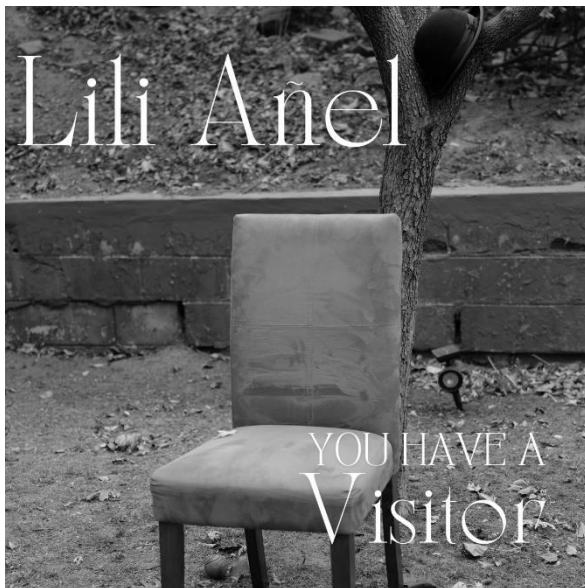
music has an effect. I didn't seem normal without records being played or the radio playing. When The Beatles came to America my mom bought a record album for my twin sister Barbara and I. She gave me *Introducing the Beatles* on Vee-Jay Records and my sister *Meet the Beatles* on Capitol Records. I remember asking her 'who are they?' and she said you'll see on Sunday. That Sunday we watched their first performance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Life was never the same after that.

**Aldora Britain Records:** And now, let's take a jump forward to the present day and your solo output. I am definitely drawn in by your superb songwriting and songcraft. How do you approach this part of your process? Are you drawn to specific themes or topics? Perhaps coming from more of a personal, observational, or even fictional perspective or point of view?

**Lili Anel:** First, I thank you for your compliment. I work hard on my writing. It is difficult to describe a definitive 'process' of songwriting although there are aspects to it that I pay attention to. Sometimes I sit down to write and a whole song is birthed, lyrics, music. I try to write every day, be methodical. The process of writing every day helps to make you a better writer. Kind of like doing sit ups, you start with ten a day and maybe in a few months you can do a hundred a day. Despite this, sometimes I need to step back and take a break. This also helps in the writing process.

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I am a life observer. I often write about what most people don’t want to face. Many times, it’s what I may not want to face. Sometimes they are incidents I’ve observed between people out in the world, on a bus, a train, anywhere. Sometimes it’s a story I make up from what I see. I may write the lyric in the first-person singular, and my delivery convinces the listener it’s about me. It gives them a face with the story and something to hold on to. How many times have I listened to a song on a record by a songwriter and thought, ‘How did they know I felt this way? This is about me!’



On my new recording *You Have a Visitor* I was influenced by the pandemic and what was going on in the world. I felt a great loss of not being able to be out in the world. It was also very scary. The song ‘Swim at Your Own Risk’ is about the pandemic. I co-wrote the lyric with my sister Barbara, also a musician. She cautioned me that people would not likely want to be reminded about the pandemic, the loss, along with the nightmare that was the political climate at the time. I have an entire notebook of lyric rewrites for this song. It was a difficult challenge for me because I felt what was going on in the pandemic very deeply, and on some level it was my way of getting it out of me. But I understood my sister’s perspective.

We came up with a story of an individual who was usually up to no good, but who had seemingly disappeared and no one knew why. But they owed money and they were being sought after by the locals, by the police. This song is an example of the importance of rewriting and co-writing. If I had allowed myself to be stuck in my own head about the pandemic, this song would not have worked out as good as I believe it did. Songs come from the process and practice of being creative. Sometimes songs come from dreams, which means it comes from you, from your deepest self. I have dreamt of songs and when I get up I play them from beginning to end, music, lyrics. You would think I’d been playing the song a long time. Those songs are a godsend.

**Aldora Britain Records:** I would like to get more specific now and focus on your most recent release, ‘Fairy Tales’. For this particular track, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire it and what does it mean to you as the writer and performer?

**Lili Anel:** I honestly don’t know what inspired this song. I had the first verse before I began to put it to music. I was thinking, somewhat absurdly, what if fairytales and the characters were real and what if they were part of my everyday life, what would that look like? Some of the characters I wrote of, like a flying dragon or alien from outer space, aren’t from fairy tales per se, but they are fictional.

Musically I immediately heard tenor saxophone for this song, particularly played by renowned musician and tenor player Larry McKenna. I had worked with Larry before on a previous recording as well as in live performance. I had contacted him and mentioned I was writing this song and that I heard him on it and wanted him to record with me when I was done. I was so happy when he agreed to recording. This is almost two years ago. Sadly, we lost Larry a year ago, before I had finished the song and was ready to record. As a result, I decided to record the song without a tenor sax on it, leaving space, as I decidedly did on the entire recording. I’d say Larry guided me in spirit even though he did not play.

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There is a line in the song that was inspired by the Warner Bros. *Looney Tunes* cartoon entitled *Little Red Riding Rabbit*. It's the story of Little Red Riding Hood with a huge twist. Of course, anything with Bugs Bunny in it has a 'twist'! The line says, 'and Riding Hood bamboozled a conniving canine.' In that version of *Riding Hood*, Little Red Riding Hood is pretty slick, dressed like some sort of Girl Scout with two-tone saddle shoes, and with an accent like she came from Brooklyn, New York. She had a lot of sass. She is hilarious. In this version she drives the wolf nuts. This is a 'fun' song and is light-hearted, unlike many of my other songs. I never know where inspiration for a lyric will come from.

This song led me to write my own fairytale which is included on this recording entitled 'The Tale of Princess Cookie'. When I wrote the song, I thought, 'I should write a fairytale.' I decided to do it as spoken word. I sandwiched the recording beginning with the song and ending with my spoken word fairytale. It was a lot of fun writing the fairytale. It came to me quickly.

**Aldora Britain Records:** This single is due to be released as part of a new project of yours, *You Have a Visitor*. I am looking forward to listening from start to finish in February. Not long to wait now! What are your memories from writing and recording this outing, and how would you say you grew and evolved as an artist throughout this process?

**Lili Anel:** I was very pleased with the songs I selected to release. I am always writing and have a surplus of songs. The idea is to put together a group of songs that fit, that I want to put out, be heard. What I like about these songs is that they were different from each other and each told a story. They are very distinct. I was initially going to record a 'solo' record, voice and guitar. In 2021 I began to perform in a duo setting with upright bassist Samuel Nobles from Philadelphia where I live. I have always wanted to perform live and record with an upright bassist. Sam and I worked very well together. Then I thought, 'Okay, let's make a duo recording.' From 2021 through the present, we also performed adding drummer-percussionist Jonathan W. Whitney who had played with me in my previous band configuration. I love working with Jonathan as he rhythmically gets where I'm coming from and often where I'm going. He finishes my sentences, if you will. Each time we performed led me to thinking, 'I'll record the trio, like we are live.'

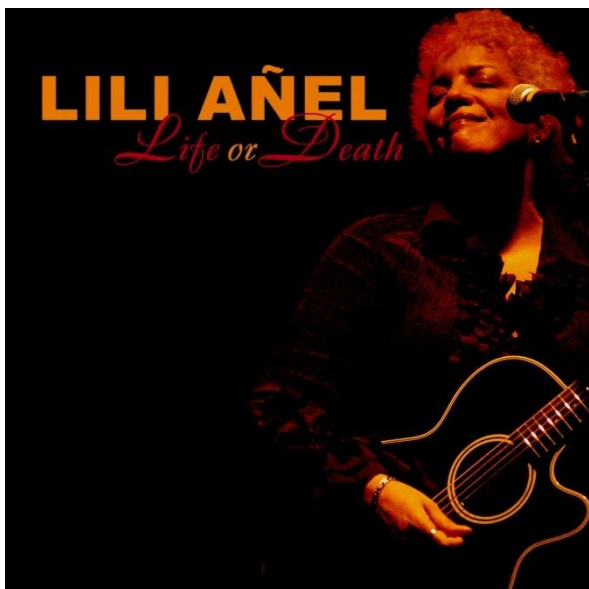


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I have co-produced my last three previous recordings and felt very clear with how I wanted this recording to sound and what I wanted it to be as its sole producer. I researched various recording studios. I wanted to be closer to home. A friend of mine, Mike Boone, who had just released a CD whose music and sound I really liked, recommended Elm Street Studios, which was where he made his record. It was also not far from my home. The studio is owned by Rob Hyman of the group The Hooters. The space was wonderful and the rate perfect. The best part was meeting Brendan McGeehan, their lead engineer. We got on very well.

The sessions were magical as we had many musicians, players, artists that we all seemed to like in tandem. Discussions of personal experiences and recollections seemed to almost conjure them up and the space became spiritual. We could do no wrong. Incidentally, we improvised one of the songs on the recording, ‘Saw the Light’. Sam was warming up playing a bassline. Jonathan began to play along on the congas and I suddenly heard a melody and lyrics and began to sing. This was while Brendan was tweaking something. Luckily Brendan felt ‘something’ was going on and hit record. It is part spoken work, part song, and totally improvised. That was new territory for me. I’ve never had the opportunity to do something like that. I believe the combination of musicians, the studio, engineer, and my sister who was assisting me in production played a big part in the ‘magic’ that happened.

I totally grew as an artist on this recording. It was a little daunting playing guitar, singing, and producing, listening back differently than I normally would. I’ve been doing this a long time and I put to use everything I have learned throughout the years. I learned to trust my instincts. They don’t steer me wrong in life or in music. I realised in this process I knew more than I thought I knew about the recording process. Again, to trust myself.



**Aldora Britain Records:** Not too long ago, you released a CD reissue of the spellbinding *Life or Death*. This was also my introduction to your work, so thank you so much for the music! How do you reflect on this set as a whole now, and is there anything that you would edit or change when looking back with the benefit of hindsight?

**Lili Anel:** My feelings about this recording are bittersweet. *Life or Death* is a compilation of two previous recordings, *Hi-Octane Coffee* and *Dream Again*, a sort of ‘Best Of’. It was released in Germany on ESC Records. It is bittersweet because the owner of that label refused to pay me after the sales of that record, citing he ‘needed the money’. He continued for some time to promote me on his label and sell the record without my getting any revenue. I got a lawyer and

did the very best I could to get payment. If I wanted to litigate further it would involve a trip to Germany. I couldn’t afford this together with the cost of a lawyer. All I got was that he removed me from his website. I was in contact with various other artists on that label, some with much higher profiles and notoriety, who also stated they never got paid. The guy is a thief.

The record is a good collection of my work. We found some copies we thought we had lost so if anyone wants a copy please go to my Bandcamp page, it will come from me. I am glad you like the recording and I take it you particularly like the song ‘Life or Death’. There is a story behind that one, perhaps for another time.

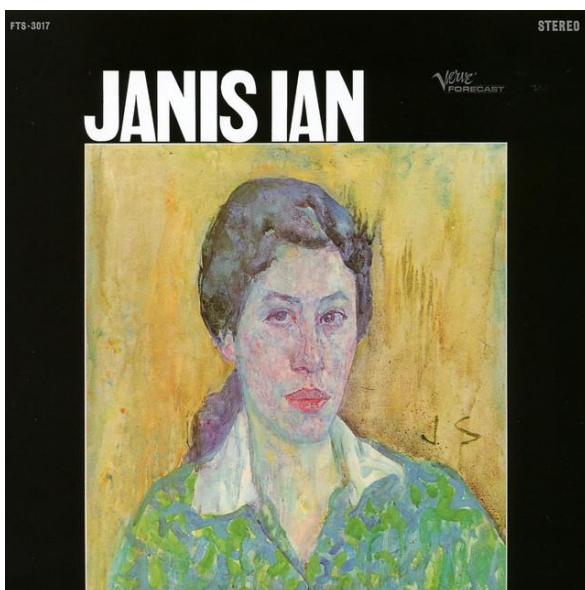
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**Aldora Britain Records:** When I listen to your recordings, I always get the impression that you would put on a truly captivating live performance. Immersive, powerful, soulful, memorable, I am sure! What do you aim to bring to the stage as an artist, and what can a fan expect from their very first Lili Anel live show?

**Lili Anel:** A fan or new audience member can expect real music in real time by real musicians. Real instruments being played. I do my very best to put the music out there, with feeling, leaving it all on the stage. I tell stories, engage the audience. I plan out my sets and sometimes will call a song the other musicians don't know and they will follow me instinctually. I've been lucky that each time I've done this the end result is incredible. I believe playing live should include playing in the moment, and seeing which way it takes you. Each time I perform, be it solo or with bass and percussion and drums, I/we work at taking the music to a higher level. Sound is paramount. There is no autotune on my recordings, you get my vocal, the same way you get it 'live'. Most of all we have a good time and want the audience to have a good time as well.

**Aldora Britain Records:** As you well know by now, I love that Anel sound and your approach to making and creating music. That jazzy, soulful, bluesy, folksy blend. How would you say this style of yours came about, what goes into it for you, and who are some of your biggest influences and inspirations as an artist currently?

**Lili Anel:** I would say my sound reflects me. I am the sum of a few parts ethnically. I was born in the US in New York City in Harlem, of Afro-Cuban parents. On my grandmother's side I am Asian, on my father's side, Spaniard. This background and the various sounds, music I heard growing up all came together to make 'me'. The largest factor is 'rhythm'. You will hear this whether I play solo or with accompaniment. It is the heart of my music. The blues and soul, what can I say it's 'Black music', the music of Africa, it has always 'been' and the root of most if not all popular music. 'Rumba' which is a well-known song and dance form in Cuba originated in Spain. We are a melting pot. I am of the rainbow people and the music is there. Folk music was storytelling as well as very political in the 60s. I was a child then.



After The Beatles came to America many television music shows sprouted that showed all kinds of music. I have a great recollection watching Janis Ian on *The Lloyd Thaxton Show* out of Pittsburgh. She sang 'Society's Child', her hit at fifteen, and was the first 'girl' I saw playing a guitar. I remember thinking, 'If she can do that I can too.' I remember seeing folk singer Richie Havens on *The Clay Cole Show*. He was mesmerising and he played 'Handsome Johnny' 'live'. Who knew that years later I would meet him and even open some of his shows. A dream come true. All influential.

When I first learned how to play guitar I played by ear. I lifted songs off of my Bob Dylan records. They were relatively easy. Of course, my ear was far more advanced than my ability. I switched majors in college and was accepted in the Leonard Davis Center for the Performing Arts at City College where I studied voice. I eventually dropped out, enrolling in The Guitar Study Center in New York, owned by Eddie Simon, Paul Simon's brother. There is where I truly began to learn guitar, theory and songwriting. I met my mentor there, Barry Kornfeld, had been instrumental in the 50s and 60s Greenwich Village folk scene.

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I never played one genre of music. I would learn songs and interpret them, play them my way. They were always different, very rhythmic. I began to listen to Joni Mitchell. She turned my head because she went from being very ‘folky’ in style to incorporating jazz, rhythm. In essence, it was what I was doing as I began to write songs. I had many people in my ear telling me to ‘play straighter’, meaning on the beat. In my ears, I often heard music off the beat and anticipated, it’s where I come from. I wasn’t sure how to be accepted and be myself. The best I could do was to move forward, keep listening to music, and explore how I wanted it to sound. That has brought me to here.

My biggest influences as I discovered my being a musician are as I have mentioned, The Beatles, songwriting in its finest form, Bob Dylan, Janis Ian, Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon, Joan Armatrading, Michael Brecker, John Coltrane, Ella Fitzgerald, Sheila Jordan, just to name a few.

**Aldora Britain Records:** A broad question to finish. There have been a lot of changes in the world in the post-COVID era, both throughout society, with political turmoil and even bloodshed in Ukraine and Palestine, and within the music industry too, AI for example. How would you say these several years have impacted you, both personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad?

**Lili Anel:** Indeed a very broad question. Personally the political turmoil scares me. I hate admitting that it scares me, but it does. So much more I can say but I don’t want to talk it into fruition. As an artist I feel a sense of urgency of putting out as much music as possible in hopes it will have a good effect on people, give them something to hold on to. It allows me an offering that helps me feel like I did something good. As well, continuing with my writing, recording and performing, shows I did not allow myself to be paralysed by the madness.



Photo: Richard Conde [www.facebook.com/richardcondemedia](http://www.facebook.com/richardcondemedia)

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I have not much to say about AI except that art comes from creators, with feeling that have hearts beating inside of them. That’s what I feel about it. The music industry has been on a steady decline for years now, AI is another straw on the camel’s back. The pandemic affected music venues, for one, from where I am sitting, in that right now many are behaving unethically in an attempt to recoup their losses from that time, still. I will leave that there. I don’t know how the pandemic changed anything for the better. If it has, I haven’t seen it yet.

## Quickfire Round

**AB Records:** Favourite artist or band? **Lili:** A very unfair question. I cannot pick one, but here is my list, The Beatles, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Janis Ian, Paul Simon, John Coltrane, Michael Brecker, Don Grolnick, Jef Lee Johnson, and boatloads more.

**AB Records:** Favourite album? **Lili:** Another unfair question. Hard pressed, *Rubber Soul* by The Beatles. **AB Records:** First album you bought with your own money? **Lili:** I don’t remember. **AB Records:** Last album you listened to from start to finish? **Lili:** Joni Mitchell, *Archives – Volume 4: The Asylum Years (1976-1980)*, disc one.

**AB Records:** First gig as an audience member? **Lili:** Les McCann and Eddie Harris, Schaefer Music Festival, Central Park. I was nine years old. **AB Records:** Loudest gig as an audience member? **Lili:** I recently went to hear Paul Weller. Wish I had earplugs. Held my ears shut for most of it.

**AB Records:** Style icon? **Lili:** Joni Mitchell. **AB Records:** Favourite TV show? **Lili:** *Barney Miller* TV reruns. My favourite series is *After Life* with Ricky Gervais.

**AB Records:** Favourite up and coming artist or band? **Lili:** This person isn’t up and coming and has been around for some time. I discovered him about a year and a half ago and I love his singing and interpretation, Paul Jost.





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