

Haunted Heart: A Biography of Susannah McCorkle  
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A BIOGRAPHY OF  
SUSANNAH McCORKLE

*by Linda Dahl*

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS

*Ann Arbor*

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Frontispiece: Susannah in a signature sparkly dress at her anchor gig,  
the Oak Room at the Algonquin Hotel, in the late nineties, with Steve Gilmore  
on bass (and Allen Farnham on piano, not shown). (Photo by Carlos Spaventa)  
Cover photograph: Rahav Segev/Photopass.com © 1999-2006; Susannah McCorkle  
performing at The Algonquin Oak Room, June 25, 1999.

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Thank God for the singers  
who follow in the path of Mabel Mercer.  
Susannah McCorkle is in the forefront.

—TONY BENNETT,  
liner notes to *Dream*, 1986

## *Acknowledgments*

In a very real sense, writing a biography is a collaborative effort, and many people helped me with *Haunted Heart*. (A beautiful ballad written in 1938 by Arthur Schwartz, with lyrics by Howard Dietz, “Haunted Heart” was an ideal song for Susannah McCorkle, a deeply romantic song shimmering with regret for lost love.<sup>1</sup>) Susannah McCorkle was a complex woman, inspiring in others complex responses and deep emotions. Almost everyone who knew her—her small number of intimates, her circles of friends and acquaintances and musical partners—gave willingly of their time and memories. It cannot have been easy to talk about this gifted romantic who had but recently, and tragically, died.

I wish to thank especially journalist Thea Lurie, Susannah’s close friend of many years, for sharing her memories of Susannah, as well as many letters, Susannah’s memoir in progress, and other writings and photographs. Pianist Keith Ingham, Susannah’s second husband and her first longtime musical partner, was unflinchingly honest about both their musical and personal relationship during Susannah’s first years as a jazz singer in London in the 1970s and then in New York into the early 1980s. Susannah’s third husband, journalist Dan DiNicola, opened his home (once also Susannah’s) in Schenectady and gave me many hours of his time, as did his sons Roy and Jeff and their families. Thea, Keith, and Dan led me to other valuable sources—Susannah’s friends, lovers, professional associates, therapists, and fellow performers. In Berkeley, Susannah’s mother, the late Mimi McCorkle, invited me into her home for a long weekend of talk and allowed me free access to files containing a lifetime’s worth of memorabilia about the McCorkles, the Savages, and the Manchesters, Susannah’s forebears, and decades of letters saved from Susannah. Susannah’s younger sister Maggie was likewise generous in her sharing. Roy Schecter, who fol-

lowed Susannah's career in New York, gave me copies of audio- and videotapes from many live performances, club dates, radio broadcasts, and television appearances in the 1980s and 1990s and many helpful factual and critical tips. Writer Rex Reed, who knew Susannah for more than a quarter-century, shared a long November afternoon with me by a crackling fire in his country farmhouse. The composer, pianist, and singer Sir Richard Rodney Bennett, who also went way back with Susannah, offered his own brand of insight over a long lunch. And writer Jim Gavin, who befriended Susannah in the 1990s, met with me in his cozy New York flat, and lent me more tapes of Susannah in performance. Susannah's friends Ellen Bollinger and Diane Feldman, Gary Gates and David Alpern, and one-time Algonquin Oak Room manager Arthur Pomposello met with me at other tables, other lunches. Jackie and Hubert Osteen, connoisseurs of singers who befriended Susannah when she was a beloved regular performer at the Algonquin, opened their hearts and their lovely South Carolina home to me, as did Susannah's very close friend, the talented performer Mark Nadler, in Riverdale. Brad Kay and Eric Olson were particularly insightful about Susannah's personality. Her biofeedback therapist, Stephen Kahan, who was, with Thea Lurie, Susannah's closest confidant at the end of her life, shared openly with me about the difficult last months of her life.

I had dozens of other insightful conversations with many generous people, including detractors, whose criticisms provided a healthy counterweight. Susannah McCorkle knew so many talented people. To all of them, I owe a debt of gratitude. Each knows what Susannah meant to them, and they to her. Thank you all. It was a pleasure to meet you.

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