

07/28/2005

A Singer and a Song to Have Their Premieres at Jazz Fest

By: Dawn Caminiti

LITCHFIELD-The Litchfield Jazz Festival is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, but for 24-year-old Lindsey Muir, who has been involved with the event since its inception, next weekend will mark more than just an anniversary.

It will be the first time the young musician, originally trained as a classical singer, will perform on the main stage as a recorded artist. Miss Muir, the daughter of festival founder and director Vita Muir, recently released her first jazz album, "You're Nearer: Love Songs of the 30s and 40s," the culmination of a year-long project that started with the discovery of a long-lost love song.

The song is called "Is It Love You're After?" and was written by Richard Bivona, Miss Muir's grandfather, who died years before she was born. He wrote it for his wife, Victoria Lorraine Bivona, who was always a significant part of Miss Muir's life and exposed her to the classic jazz and Broadway songs that shaped the young musician's debut album.

Miss Muir first heard the song at her grandmother's bedside when her mother and aunt sang it to comfort their dying mother. Growing up with music all around her, she was surprised to hear a song she didn't recognize.

"I was shocked. I always thought he wrote jingles, I didn't know he wrote a major ballad, and it was just beautiful," she said of her grandfather.

She later found the sheet music to the song tucked in a file inside the old record player her grandmother left to her-the same record player she sat in front of as a young girl, singing along to the music with her grandmother. It was one of those "old school" types that was more like another piece of furniture than music equipment-the kind that had speakers built in and cabinets to house the records, or in Miss Muir's case, to house her grandfather's sheet music for a love song he wrote for his wife a lifetime ago.

Miss Muir first sang the song at her grandmother's memorial service, and decided not long after that it should be recorded. It was too beautiful to keep secret.

Music has always been a part of her life. Miss Muir earned a bachelor's degree in music from the University of Connecticut and has worked with the Litchfield Jazz Festival and its summer camps since she was 15. Still, she never planned to create her own album or pursue a recording career. The project started because she wanted to record one song.

Then, she thought that if she was going to get a group of talented musicians together, they might as well record a few more songs. So she went through her grandmother's old records and thumbed through books of music until she found a selection of songs to which she felt a connection.

"I didn't intend for it to be 30s and 40s songs, it just worked out that all the music I loved happened to be love songs from the 30s and 40s. I picked songs that spoke to me, that broke my heart," Miss Muir explained.

She recorded seven songs in her living room Aug. 2 of last year, right before the annual Litchfield Jazz Festival, which is overseen by the organization headed by her mother, Litchfield Performing Arts. Because of her involvement with the festival and the Jazz Festival Summer Institute weeks before, Miss Muir already knew quite a few accomplished musicians who were happy to be a part of her recording.

She said her ensemble-composed of John Benitez, Dave Berkman, Don Braden, Winard Harper, Terrell Stafford and Mark Whitfield-is really what has made the album so successful.

Four of the 11 tracks on Miss Muir's album are live recordings from that August session in her living room. Two others were recorded then, and the remaining songs are from a second session at a recording studio in New Jersey seven months later.

She maintained complete creative control throughout the development of her album, choosing to produce it independently rather than seek out a record label. She wanted to decide which songs to include, their order and how they would be played.

"I'm 110 percent happy with it. I didn't have to compromise on anything," she noted.

She did listen to suggestions from the experienced cast of musicians, and some of the songs-such as "My Ship," written by Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin-take on a new flavor and tempo.

The album, released at the beginning of the month, is already holding its own on jazz radio stations from Massachusetts to Philadelphia. Trinity College's radio station, WRTC, ranks it at No. 2, and Litchfield's own WZBG is playing it during its Sunday Morning Jazz program. What Miss Muir really wants to come out of the project is for people to have as much fun listening to it as she did making it.

"My hope is people will dance around in their kitchens or living rooms and have a good time with it-put it on in their cars and get caught at a stop sign singing along," Miss Muir said.

Miss Muir is scheduled to perform songs from her album at the Litchfield Jazz Festival, Aug. 7 at 1:45 p.m. The Sunday performance will be her first live performance of this stature since she started recording her album. Additional information about Miss Muir and the album can be found at the Web site, www.lindseymuir.com.

The 10th Annual Litchfield Jazz Festival will be held Aug. 5, 6 and 7 at the Goshen Fairgrounds, located on Route 63 in Goshen. Lawn seats are \$35, and tent seats are \$53. Two-day lawn seats are \$63, while two-day tent seats are \$99. Three-day lawn seats are \$96, and three-day tent seats are \$149. Friends tickets are \$125 and Best Friends are \$350. For information, Litchfield Performing Arts can be reached by calling 860-567-4162, or at www.litchfieldjazzfest.com.