

South Whidbey Record

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Nancy Nolan sings standards and hot Latin jazz at WICA

By Patricia Duff
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She grew up with a piano in the kitchen of her Capitol Hill home.

So as a child, Nancy Nolan learned by ear the recipe for making music.

The jazz vocalist and pianist returns to the Whidbey Island Center for the Arts stage at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 12 with a band of excellent musicians behind her.

"What I like best about performing is simply the chills I still feel; the awe and wonder in which I marvel in the music and the opportunity to help the audience experience that, too," Nolan said.

For this evening of jazz both American- and Latin-influenced, Nolan has invited Luis Peralta, an Argentine drummer and percussionist who has worked with Dizzy Gillespie, Blossom Dearie, Bob Dorough and most recently at Teatro Zinzanni. Nolan will also be accompanied by longtime friend and first-call New York and Seattle bassist, Dan O'Brien, with Brazilian guitarist Eric Reid rounding out the quartet.

The evening will be hosted by local luminary David Ossman of Firesign Theater fame, ever working his microphone magic.

"At this point in my life, I am free to expand my horizons, stepping into bigger arenas of jazz, cabaret and musical theater," Nolan said.

One of those arenas is the South American sounds of Latin jazz inspired by having Reid with her on the guitar. After she fell in love with Jorge Drexler's "Al Otro Lado Del Rio," she decided she needed a classical guitarist.

"He recorded and toured with Astrud Gilberto, the original '[Girl from Ipanema](#),'" Nolan said excitedly.

"He plays all the harmonics; the way this man plays you think you were hearing the original Jobim," she said.

She refers to Antônio Carlos Brasileiro de Almeida Jobim, the famous Brazilian songwriter, arranger, singer, pianist and guitarist who wrote "The Girl from Ipanema," a song made famous by Gilberto's recording.

"I hope all the guitarists on the island come out for this. This man is incredible," Nolan said.

Nolan herself has been also considered incredible in her own right.

Her mother probably thought her quite incredible when she taught her daughter how to play "Alexander's Ragtime Band" on the ukulele when she was 4.

Her father, an amateur Irish tenor, sang all the '40s classics around the house, which made Nolan want to sing, too.

"I always sang, I thought everybody did," Nolan recalled.

She remembers improvising songs accompanied by the rhythm of the windshield wipers during her father's rainy day drives in the car.

She kept singing, even after both her parents had died by the time she was 18.

The Seattle native carved out a niche for herself in music from a young age, supporting herself singing commercial jingles back in the day, while being coached by renowned voice teacher George Peckham. Peckham became a significant mentor and helped her launch her career as a professional performer.

Nolan has run the gamut of singing jobs, playing the lead in the 1975 ACT Theatre production of "Godspell," singing the National Anthem for the Sonics at the Kingdome and eventually going out on the road as a singer, pianist and guitarist. She has "warmed up the room" at the Village Gate and the Metropolitan Room in New York City, was featured in a musical documentary at the Museum of Modern Art, and has performed close to home at ACT Theatre's Bullitt Cabaret.

She also performed with the late, great comedian and composer [Steve Allen](#) at Jazz Alley, after having recorded an album of his compositions. Allen called her "a wonderful jazz singer of particular interest" and a singer with "her own original style; thoughtful and emotional."

Throughout her career, she has performed extensively in the United States, Canada, Japan and Europe in both jazz clubs and on the musical theater stage.

Nolan continues to sing at Northwest jazz festivals and perform her solo cabaret act on the road, in addition to her work as a private voice coach at her home in Langley.

"I fell in love with jazz and immersed myself in new vocal and piano inspirations, where I found my own style and expression in 'The Great American Songbook' from the living room of my youth," she said.

Indeed, Nolan recorded a CD of "The Great American Songbook" titled "Nancy Nolan Sings," and she is putting together a group of musicians to record her second CD.

She is a singer who follows her bliss and, although her first Glee Club teacher reminded her more than once to: "Please tone it down and try to blend, Nancy," Nolan said blending has never been in her nature. She is too passionate, as music had been conditioned into her soul from those very first days at the piano in the kitchen. That, she said, is what makes her performances more emotional. She'd rather sing with the passion she remembers sharing with her parents in her childhood, than with any "blend in" perfection.

"Performing is communicating, offering a gift, telling your story and hopefully tapping into the very humanness we all share," Nolan said.

"At it's best, it inspires us and takes us to a place in ourselves where we find truth and beauty."

Tickets cost \$15. Call the box office at 221-8268 or 800-638-763.

To find out more about her upcoming events, CDs and vocal coaching, visit www.nancynolan.com.