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**Joy to the World brings holiday cheer to Charleston**
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By *Mona Seghatoleslami*

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December 4, 2009 · Thursday night at the Culture Center, jazz singer and pianist Diane Marino will perform on West Virginia Public Broadcasting's Joy to the World Christmas show.

The Joy to the World jazz concert is an annual Christmas tradition in Charleston. Pianist Bob Thompson and friends have been welcoming a different guest singer to perform with them for the past 17 years.

This year's guest is singer-piano player Diane Marino, who takes classic tunes and reworks them in her own style.



Singer/pianist Diane Marino will perform at Joy to the World this Thursday.

"I just like taking a standard and making it my own," she said. "I'm a pianist so I'll sit there and just fool around with the melody. I'll always change the chord structure, and I might hear the hook of the song and it might be done one way, but I'll hear it in a swing feel, something like that.

"Just like my last CD, I took all these pop songs, that were pop songs in the 60s, and I turned around them into something else. Still recognizable, but very different in their concept and the feel."

Marino started out as a classical pianist, studying at Mannes College of Music in New York City.

"Most people can hear that in my playing," she said. "I'm definitely affected by all that music. I love Chopin, and Beethoven, and Bach, and Brahms.

"Jazz and classical are so finely intertwined, and I think if you come from that classical background, it's probably the best way to approach any music after that. Certainly builds up your dexterity and technique, but also I find all the colors you get from playing classical music and just appreciating all those composers, it definitely seeps over into jazz improvisation and some pop stuff too."

Singing became part of her professional career when she started looking for gigs in New York.

"I always sang, but I started thinking of it professional when I was in college," she said. "And I was looking into doing some solo work, and I was advised to do solo work, you have to sing. You can just play, you have to sing too.

"So, I started singing favorite songs of mine, pop stuff from back then, then had to find out where my voice was, and where the register was, and it just grew from there, from a desire to go out and work."

In Charleston, Marino will sing some old favorites, as well as some

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new Christmas tunes she's discovered:

"I love all the music from the Charlie Brown Christmas; I'll be doing Christmas Time is Here – a little bit of a different version, a different feel with Bossa Nova," she said. "Also, some new songs that have become favorites of mine.

"It should be a lot of fun getting together to do something. It's always a treat to play with new musicians, to get together and make music together."

Joy to the World, featuring Diane Marino, takes place at the Culture Center in Charleston, Thursday night at 8 p.m. Last year's Joy to the World concert will be broadcast on West Virginia Public Radio, Monday December 21 at 9 p.m.

Full disclosure: Mona Seghatoleslami is involved with the production.

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