

## THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL – Memphis, TN

September 4, 2013

Interview by Mark Jordan

Nashville-based jazz pianist Diane Marino has never played the Germantown Performing Arts Center, but she's not unfamiliar with the venue.

"I have been there before," says Marino, remembering a night back in February. "I came there for a concert because my nephew plays piano in the Glenn Miller Orchestra, so we decided to drive out and see him and hear the band. Music is the family business."

On Friday Marino makes her performance debut at Germantown Performing Arts Center when she and her trio — which includes her husband and bassist Frank Marino, drummer Chris Brown, and saxophone/flute player Cole Burgess — play two shows in the venue's intimate black box theater. Her appearance is the kickoff to the center's revamped "Jazz in the Box" concert series.

"Those concerts used to sell out through subscriptions," says executive director Paul Chandler, explaining the decision to add a second show to each entry in the series. "Now most of our subscribers are going to the 8:30 p.m. show and about 30 or 40 are going to the 7 p.m. show, which opens the concerts up to new people, allowing the series to grow and helping pay to bring these great jazz artists to Germantown."

In Marino concertgoers will get a pianist and vocalist who has won raves for her musical chops as well as her respectful, soulful reinterpretations of traditional and Latin jazz.

Born in New York City, she began playing music by ear at the age of 8.

"My mom always played by ear," says Marino. "She instilled that love of music in us. She sang all the time around the house and played piano, and I was just drawn to it."

Marino attended New York's High School for the Performing Arts, the school made famous by the film "Fame" and subsequent television series, where she honed her classical chops before going on to study at Mannes College of Music in Manhattan.

Along the way, Marino played most every kind of music, including pop and country, experience that paid off when Marino and her husband relocated to Nashville in 1989.

"We had made some trips and found it was a really nice music community, smaller than New York City, of course, but we just liked the feel of it," says Marino.

In the '90s, Marino continued her sonic explorations, including playing bossa nova and forming a full samba band that toured the region for several years.

So when she released her debut record, *A Sleepin' Bee*, a decade ago on M&M Records, it was no surprise that Marino included tunes by the likes of Antonio Carlos Jobim alongside Miles Davis and Charlie Parker. Despite being released on an indie label, *A Sleepin' Bee* cracked the Top 20 of the jazz charts.

She duplicated the feat the next year with *On the Street Where You Live*. *Just Groovin'* from 2008 found Marino putting her eclectic spin on '60s pop songs. Her 2011 CD *From the Heart* collected favorite tracks from her first three CDs.

On her latest, *Loads of Love*, released in April on M&M, Marino strays from the Latin beat to tackle the great American Songbook, including songs by Cole Porter, Louis Armstrong, and Rodgers and Hart.

"I hadn't really done anything like this before," Marino says of the challenge the record presented her. "These are great tunes but the songs weren't too terribly overdone. That's the problem with the American Songbook, people tend to do the same songs that you hear all the time. These diverge from that. We have songs like 'Take Love Easy' and 'It Shouldn't Happen To a Dream,' both Duke Ellington songs that are hardly ever done."

To help her realize her vision, Marino turned to Houston Person, the esteemed veteran jazz saxophonist with whom she had worked on *Just Groovin'*. A Eubie Blake Jazz Award winner who has played with Lena Horne, Lou Rawls, Horace Silver, and Etta Jones — as well as leading more than 75 recording dates himself — it was Person who had long pushed Marino to tackle the American Songbook in the first place. So when she finally decided to do it, the 78-year-old seemed like the perfect choice to produce.

"There nothing about the American Songbook he doesn't know," says Marino, explain how Person kept the session focused on the impeccable melodies. "He was very important to guiding the whole project. His expertise was invaluable."

Diane Marino

When: 7 and 8:30 p.m. Friday

Where: Germantown Performing Arts Center Black Box Theater

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