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# Business

# PIANO MAN

Music store  
owner releases  
his first album

By JOAN GALLER  
Staff Writer

**LAWRENCE** — Al Rinaldi, the owner of Jacobs Music Co. in Lawrenceville, is the consummate music man: He sells pianos, plays an Italian accordion in a Florida nightspot, and hosts hundreds of recitals yearly to showcase young musicians.

Now, the 73-year-old Mt. Laurel resident, who owns six Jacobs Music Co. stores here and in Cherry Hill, Philadelphia, Allentown and Willow Grove, Pa., and Wilmington, Del., has produced his first CD album, "Ciao, Bella" — which is "Hello, Beautiful" in Italian.

Rinaldi offers his listeners some of the most beloved Italian songs and the best musicians around, including himself, playing a "midi accordion," which mimics a mandolin, vibraphone, clarinet, flute and 25 accordion sounds.

The album, says Rinaldi, is a testament to his love of music, the importance of music in his life and his philosophy — "Never give up, never say I can't do it" — that has sustained him throughout his life.

Abandoned by his mother as a 9-month-old infant, little Al survived his first nine years by singing for pennies to buy food in the streets of his native Scranton, Pa., and begging at restaurants for scraps "for the dog" that didn't exist.

His fortunes brightened when a kind German woman working in a restaurant where he was begging took him home, fed and clothed him, and for the next 8 years, let him focus on going to school "like a normal kid." She also paid for a few years of accordion lessons, which opened more doors for Al.

"I didn't know I was Italian until I was 17 and went to get a copy of my birth certificate because I was enlisting in the



Al Rinaldi, who owns six Jacobs Music stores, has created an album called "Ciao, Bella."

Navy," Rinaldi said. But he was pleased because it fit his temperament and love of romantic Italian songs.

After his Navy discharge and several semesters of college on the GI bill, Rinaldi switched from playing to selling instruments, and by age 22 he had made his mark by managing music departments in two iconic Philadelphia stores, Gimbels and Wanamakers, and later Strawbridge & Clothier.

"Where others failed, I succeeded," Rinaldi recalled. Over the next two decades, he bought and sold various music competitors, turning each one around, and ultimately bought Jacobs Music Co. in 1976, the jewel in his entrepreneurial crown.

His initial foray into Mercer County came in 1995 with his acquisition of the Chopin Piano Co. in Trenton, which he closed in 2000 and relocated to 2450 Brunswick Pike Lawrenceville as Jacobs Music Co.

For his many years of selling and servicing Steinway & Son pianos at Jacobs' Philadelphia flagship store, Rinaldi was honored in 2009 as Steinway Dealer of the Year, just one of

the many honors and awards he's received over the past four decades.

Rinaldi also promotes 200 recitals and master classes yearly at his six stores to encourage young performers, and as a devoted philanthropist, he uses musical events to raise money for worthy causes. In 2004, in just one weekend, he raised \$75,000 for UNICEF's \$100,000 campaign for global peace and to aid needy children.

While he hands out awards each year to music students at area colleges and universities, a steady stream of honors and awards keeps coming in for Rinaldi, whose two sons now help run his business and will carry on in the future.

Christopher, 48, is now president and chief financial officer, and Robert, 42, senior vice president for operations/sales. A third son, Michael, died of cancer at 41.

His wife, Gabrielle Kazze Rinaldi, is active on the board of the Curtis Institute of Music.

When he's down at his Florida winter home, Rinaldi plays Tuesday nights at Blue Jeans Jazz Club in Fort Lauderdale

He got back to playing music about 8 years ago after working hard for 30 years at his businesses and fighting a variety of cancers 11 times.

"I was told by a world-class cancer researcher and Harvard Medical School professor, the late Dr. Judah Folkman, that I was the longest living survivor of multiple cancers in the world," Rinaldi said.

"I credit my music for sustaining me throughout my life and overcoming my illnesses," he said. "My motto is 'never give up' and never say 'I can't do it.'"

Songs on Rinaldi's "Ciao Bella" CD include "The Love Theme from the Godfather I," "Santa Lucia," "Volare," "Amado Mio," "Isle of Capri," "Mala Femmina," "Tarantella," and "Arrivederci Roma." The recording artists hail from Sicily, Cuba, Ecuador, Brazil, Las Vegas, Philadelphia, Miami, South Florida, Mt. Laurel and Cape May.

"Ciao, Bella" can be purchased for \$15 plus shipping at CD Baby.com or ordered directly from Jacobs Music Co. by email to [acr@jacobsmusic-company.com](mailto:acr@jacobsmusic-company.com)