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Musician has global reach

By: KRISTEN COPPOCK
Burlington County Times

MOUNT LAUREL - Music has always been a part of Al Rinaldi's life.

It's been a source of entertainment and comfort, as well as a means of survival.

At age 73, the lifelong musician has recorded his first solo album in celebration of his passion for the art form, as well as the family he has never known. "Ciao Bella" is a combination of classic Italian songs and Latin jazz, and features world-class musicians from around the globe.

"I always had interest in making an Italian CD," Rinaldi said by phone from Lighthouse Point, Fla. "I have no real contact with my heritage."

A musician and businessman, the Mount Laurel resident never knew his father and was abandoned by his mother at only nine months old. Left to fend for himself, Rinaldi crawled to a neighbor's apartment. He eventually was taken in by an Irish woman who relied on public assistance.

By age 6, Rinaldi was singing in Scranton, Pa., bars and panhandling. An older boy accompanied him on the saxophone and took most of the money they earned. Often Rinaldi ate moldy food discarded by others, using sugar to disguise the taste.

"I would ask for food for the dogs," he said. "We didn't have dogs."

Hearing him sing, a German woman invited Rinaldi to live with her, and she taught the boy to play the accordion. "If it wasn't for her, music would never have become part of my life," he said.

Later, while serving his country, Rinaldi played the clarinet in the U.S. Navy Band, and music provided a source of comfort during the cancer survivor's 11 bouts with the deadly disease, which took the life of a son.

However, Rinaldi also credits music for his successes in life.

As a businessman, his focus has been selling pianos. Since 1986, he has owned Jacobs Music Company of Philadelphia and serves as its chairman and CEO. In 2009, Rinaldi was recognized by world-renowned Steinway with its prestigious Dealer of the Year award. The job, he said, allows him to interact with some of the world's finest performing artists.

Rinaldi also married a woman with a background in music. His wife, Gabrielle Kazze Rinaldi, is a member and secretary of the Board of Overseers of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and an executive with the family business.

"My whole life has been tied together by music," he said. "It's just always been there."

Rinaldi learned about his Italian heritage from his birth certificate. Several years ago, he looked for a way to connect with his family, and realized he loved the romantic nature of Italian music.

"I tried to learn to speak Italian to no real success, but I always had a feel for romantic music," he said.

On "Ciao Bella," Rinaldi covers 13 familiar songs, including "Tarantella," "Godfather I - Love Theme," "Summertime in Venice," "Amore Scusami" and "Arrivederci Roma." He plays traditional and MIDI accordions. The latter, with its musical instrument digital interface, creates sounds replicating a mandolin, flute and clarinet.

Nine other musicians and four vocalists accompany Rinaldi on his solo effort. They hail from Italy, Brazil and Ecuador, as well as Las Vegas, Philadelphia, Cape May and Florida, where Rinaldi spends four months of each year.

"I wanted to find musicians and singers who had a natural affinity to perform Italian music," he said.

The new CD is the fifth album for which Rinaldi has recorded music, but the first to include Italian influences and to call his own.

The first four CDs were all jazz standards.

"Ciao Bella" reportedly is being played on several radio shows, and is available to film and television producers seeking music for their projects. The album may be purchased online at www.CDBaby.com, and Rinaldi is working on getting it distributed in Italy. "That's my dream," he said.

In addition to recording, Rinaldi occasionally performs live with other musicians at the Blue Jeans Blues jazz club in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Mirabella Cafe in Cherry Hill.

County people

Al Rinaldi

Age: 73

Occupation: Musician

Residence: Mount Laurel

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