



Trisha O'Brien, who sings jazz standards and songs from the Great American Songbook, is living a dream

By Michael Heaton, The Plain Dealer
March 13, 2010

In 2005, jazz chanteuse Trisha O'Brien took a birthday gig at the Shoreby Club for an acquaintance's 90-year-old mother. Jeff Cole wanted to know if O'Brien could tailor some lyrics from the Cole Porter tune "Night and Day" to honor his mom. They worked on the song together and hit it off.

Two years later, O'Brien and Cole were married and traveling between homes in Manhattan and Palm Beach, Fla. But even though she had played every venue in Northeast Ohio twice, if not more, O'Brien wasn't ready to hang up her singing career.

"I felt like I had more to sing," she said over a lunch at Nighttown. "More to say with my songs."



JACEK ANDRZEJ

Cleveland native and jazz standard singer Trisha O'Brien is seen here singing at Feinstein's at the Loews Regency Hotel in New York City in January. She was in Cleveland this week promoting her new 14-song CD, "Out of a Dream."

Jeffrey A. Cole, formerly chairman and CEO of Cole National, was a fan of O'Brien's first CD, "They Say It's Wonderful." She had paid for it and put it out herself in 2003.

"She's so talented, I said, 'Let's try another one' " said Cole, who became the executive producer on the project that would be called "Out of a Dream." I just thought, what if Trisha brought together the best people in the business? We could put out a wonderful jazz CD. And I think we did."

O'Brien, who admits to being fortysomething, brought in pianist Shelly Berg as her arranger, Grammy Award winner Elaine Martone as the record producer, Peter Washington on bass, Lewis

Nash on drums and Ken Peplowski on tenor saxophone. The result is "Out of a Dream," on local label Azica. It came out in late January and is in stores now.

The CD contains 14 standards from the American songbook including "Taking a Chance on Love," "It Might Be You," "In The Wee Small Hours of the Morning," and "It Could Happen to You." There's also the Joni Mitchell song "Help Me."

"The theme of this album is 'crazy in love,' " said O'Brien. "It's not about broken hearts or lost love, or longing for love. It's very up-tempo and happy. I feel very at peace in my life right now. I'm very centered, and these songs come from that place."

O'Brien, grew up on Cleveland's East Side. She didn't come to professional singing until later in her life. She attended Bowling Green State University, where she majored in social work. At age 27, she began singing at clubs and other venues doing pop songs of Smokey Robinson and James Taylor.

The direction of her singing career was forever changed when she discovered the songs of Nat "King" Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, Chet Baker, Nancy Wilson and other giants of the American songbook, standard jazz tunes from the 1930s, '40s and '50s.

"I've been called a modern traditionalist," said O'Brien. "If that makes sense. I think of myself as a song stylist. I hope there's subtle storytelling in the way I sing my songs. I never went to music school. I'm a graduate of Street University. The musicians who worked with me taught me so much."

O'Brien cut her teeth performing at Rick's Cafe and Gamekeeper's restaurant, the Cleveland Play House Club, Club Isabella, Nighttown and the Cleveland Museum of Art courtyard. She also worked the party centers and country clubs playing weddings, bar mitzvahs and birthday parties. Like the one where she got together with Cole.

"Of course I'm biased," said Cole. "But this is a wonderful album for jazz fans. For people who love standards. And for fans of Trisha. I know she has them here in Cleveland and other cities too."

O'Brien plans to be back in Cleveland this summer and have a CD party/performance at Nighttown sometime in July. She looks forward to coming back to town. But she loves her new life too. The art on her CD cover shows her at the ocean's edge in Palm Beach.

"Sometimes I'm walking down the beach and I can't believe how much my life has changed," she said smiling. "It's like, pinch me!"