

NEW ALBUM

From jazz clubs to Beatles covers, Mary Ann Palermo keeps music personal

Her latest project reimagines songs of the Beatles with with producer and "Beatlemania" star Tom Teeley

By Matt Martinez, The Berkshire Eagle
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NEW MARLBOROUGH — In Mary Ann Palermo's earliest memories of jazz, her father is at center stage.

Growing up in New Rochelle, N.Y., she remembers visits to the city to see her grandmother with excursions to a few clubs where he'd perform — in old school Italian venues, where everyone was like a big family, she wasn't out of place even as a little girl, she recalled.

"I had my little crinoline dress on, but I'd see my daddy up there and he had the martini and the cigarette," Palermo said with a smile. "That's what the guys did, and he loved it — that's what kind of put the bug in me."



New Marlborough jazz singer Mary Ann Palermo will release her cover album "There's A Place (Beatles Reimagined)" with Tom Teeley in late September.

SAM BACKHAUS PHOTOGRAPHY

If You Go

Who: Mary Ann Palermo

Where: Apple Tree Inn, 10 Richmond Mountain Road, Lenox

When: 7 p.m. Sept. 25 and Oct. 16

Reservations: 413-637-1910, appletreeinnlenox.com

Years later, Palermo began her own musical pursuits — she picked up a guitar and started composing originals, starting out with open mics en route to a real gig at the Lion’s Den before getting recruited by a country band and ultimately a jazz band. She’s never been constrained to one genre, dabbling in country, pop and blues tunes — she also serves as the liturgical music director for two churches in the Southern Berkshires.

But her first love has always been jazz — you may have stumbled on the New Marlborough-based performer singing the staples in the Ostrich Room at Lenox’s [Apple Tree Inn](#) or the former Dorothy’s Estaminet in Pittsfield. Palermo’s forthcoming project, “There’s A Place (Beatles Reimagined)” with producer/collaborator [Tom Teeley](#), will be yet another chance to showcase that affection.

Working with Teeley, a multi-instrumentalist and vocal chameleon who played George Harrison in “Beatlemania” on Broadway, Palermo aims to present soulful alternatives to classic hits by the Fab Four. A pair of lead singles provide a preview of the record’s vibe, as Palermo lends her vocals to a slowed-down, sentimental take on the Beatles’ “[I’ll Get You](#)” and a jaunty [horn-and-organ cut](#) of “[The Word](#),” both less prominent tunes in the band’s canon.

As Palermo said, the essence of the songs is still there — she and Teeley just hope to add a different resonance to them. Working with a producer like Teeley, she said, allows her to “stretch” and get outside the box a bit.

“It’s just making something more personal — it’s my take, it’s his take, it’s our combined take on transcribing the song into something new that people are going to listen to and hopefully enjoy,” Palermo said.

The full album, which features eight Beatles covers, is set to be released sometime in late September, but those looking to get more acquainted with Palermo’s music can find her previous work on [Spotify](#) in the meantime.

On the 2024 longplayer “In The Night,” Palermo breathes new life into “torch songs and ballads,” including some from the public domain, pairing her vocals with a Steinway piano accompaniment. “Jazz On The Rocks” (2022) features covers of beloved hits, like the theme from “Goldfinger” originally performed by Shirley Bassey and Donald Fagen’s “Walk Between The Raindrops.”

In her previous singles, listeners can also get a taste of Palermo’s songwriting, often informed by some prior experience or inspiration in everyday life. The song “Whispers of the Angels,” for example, came from observing her grandchildren playing while she sat by the waters of Umpachene Falls. Another, “With No Regrets,” was written in memory of her late father.

Other songs come to her in unexpected places – visits with friends, things she overhears standing in line at the grocery store, etcetera. She keeps a shoebox filled with phrases etched onto scraps of paper under her bed, she said, and when she needs inspiration, she lays them out and begins to tackle the composition like a puzzle.

“Then you have to fine-tune it, of course,” she said. “But it gives you an idea.”

Regardless of whether Palermo’s singing a cover of a beloved hit or belting out some words from her own repertoire, she often loses herself pursuing the emotional core of a song. It’s a process that regularly leaves her misty-eyed, as she digs deep for each rendition in the studio.

“Sometimes I’ll get teary, even if it’s not a sad song, because ... your depths of your soul just come out in it,” Palermo said. “And I get immersed in it – I kind of forget the room I’m in, where I am, the microphone and all that. I just think of the lyrics and what the lyrics really mean.”

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