

Jean Louisa Kelly – For My Folks Biography

In 1995, a young actress named **Jean Louisa Kelly** stole the hearts of many singing the classic “Someone to Watch Over Me” in the acclaimed film, “Mr. Holland’s Opus” (starring Richard Dreyfuss as a frustrated composer turned influential high school music teacher). In 2017, that actress is releasing a most personal one-from-the-heart collection of songs from the American Standards and Musical Theater songbooks entitled *For My Folks*, dedicated to her parents, the music they raised her on, and all the good people who flooded Jean’s web pages begging her to record such a project. In addition to a stunning new rendition of “Someone to Watch Over Me” complete with a cappella introduction, the 13-song project features moving renditions of timeless gems such as “Singin’ in the Rain,” “If I Love You (from ‘Carousel’)” “Where or When,” “Danny Boy” and an especially heart-tugging version of “As Time Goes By.” Each song was personally plucked by Ms. Kelly from cherished memories and given musical arrangements of tender loving care by producer **Todd Schroeder** with inventive instrumentation choices that make each evergreen fresh again. Special guest **John Lloyd Young** (star of “Jersey Boys” on Broadway and on film) lends a sparkling presence to “For Me and My Gal” while throughout the disc, Jean Louisa Kelly caresses every lyric and sentiment with wistfulness, intimacy and love.

“These are songs that have been in my head forever,” Jean shares, “music I’ve been hearing all my life from the beginning. And my parents have influenced me from the very beginning. My mother was a piano teacher who taught me to read music... she used to sit down at the piano and play these songs and I would sing along to them. I’ve always wanted to do an album of standards but, lately, more so something for my folks.”

With so many singers returning to standards, musical theatre gems and the American Songbook annually, the personal affection and connection to the songs set Jean’s transfixing versions miles apart. “Singin’ in the Rain” – a centerpiece of the project – connects to Jean’s love of musicals that starred the great Gene Kelly...who also happens to share her name. “I loved Gene Kelly growing up, especially opposite Debbie Reynolds in ‘Singin’ in the Rain.’ My Dad has had a thing for the name ‘Jean’ since he was a child. Though I’ve been told it was not intended for me to be named after him, it kind of works out nicely...” “Where or When” is another favorite of Jean’s that her father also loved. “My voice teacher Steve Sweetland’s parents are old time radio legends Lee & Sally Sweetland,” Jean

schools. “Sally was a beautiful singer who sang vocals for some of Joan Fontaine’s movies. She recorded ‘Where or When.’ When I sing it, I think of her.”

The poignant cultural chestnut “Danny Boy” is a nod to the Irish roots in Jean’s genealogical tree while the CD opener “I Got the Sun in the Morning” – originally from the western musical “Annie Get Your Gun” – entered Jean’s life as part of a children’s musical revue she participated in growing up in Worcester, Massachusetts. Fast forward to 1995 - the same year she appeared in “Mr. Holland’s Opus” as “Rowena Morgan” - Jean portrayed “Luisa Bellamy” in a film adaptation of “The Fantasticks” from which the song “Soon it’s Gonna Rain” originates. Prior to the film, Jean performed in a stage version as well so she has deep history with both the song and the mother work.

Another contributing factor to the new life Jean breathes into these long-enduring classics is that her recordings are the product of spanking new collaborations with musicians masterful in their field yet with whom she herself had never worked. Most prominent is Musical Director/Producer **Todd Schroeder**, a seasoned musician and musical supervisor for television and independent film shorts who also helmed singer/actor Sam Harris’ “HAM: A Musical Memoir” (directed by Billy Porter). “I met Todd at a benefit held at the Pasadena Playhouse,” Jean reflects. “Looking for a producer for this project, I wanted to use a pianist with experience in standards/musical theater. When I asked Sam Harris, a mutual friend, for a recommendation, Sam said, ‘You simply *must* work with Todd – *there’s nobody better!*’ I called Todd, he said, ‘Hell, yeah,’ and we started meeting once or twice a week, picking songs. We started with over 20.” In the process of narrowing down her selections, Jean learned a valuable lesson about the nature of material from the era – a discovery that additionally aided in making her final lineup a winning hand. “I found I was partial to certain themes and that that a lot of them were really sort of the same song just with different notes! It was illuminating...”

Lending an extra stellar lift to *For My Folks* is **John Lloyd Young** who turns Jean’s rendition of “For Me and My Gal” into a wonderful duet. “I first met John at yet another benefit nine years ago,” Jean laughs. “When Todd said I needed a duet, John popped right into my mind. He’s got this very unique sound, When I hear him sing, I just smile all over... He said yes and he’s just delightful. I’d already recorded my part. We plugged him in an hour and a half.”

For most fans, however, this CD will be first and foremost the place where they can finally have an audio keepsake of Jean singing “Someone to Watch Over Me” which she immortalized in “Mr. Holland’s Opus.” “That song is a signature for me.

The film was actually shot in '94 so it's been 23 years. People *still* write in to my website all the time asking when am I going to record it and/or songs like it. I had always known the song – I grew up with it. Actually, I replaced another actress for that part -- they were already shooting when the girl had a conflict with another movie. They needed to recast *immediately* so I got a call to go come in, read the lines and sing the song. I was flown to the set in Oregon from New York, met the director Stephen Herek and Richard Dreyfuss, then went to work a week later -- I was so lucky! As with all the songs on the CD, Todd and I worked out the arrangement but he came up with the instrumentation. It was also his idea for me to open the song alone - a cappella. So, I'm grateful to the people who liked my singing and wanted to hear more. *For My Folks* is for those folks, too."

Prior to *For My Folks*, Jean recorded two EPs – the spiritual/inspirational *Willing* and the dizzily eclectic *Relax: Nothing is Under Control* that reveals varying aspects of her personality – both digitally distributed via iTunes, Amazon, Spotify, CD Baby and TuneCore. She also recorded two singles she wrote inspired by films she worked in: "Don't Give Up" for Netflix's "1000 to 1: The Corey Weissman Story" (real drama about a basketball kid who has a stroke) and "Valley of Fire" for the indie western "Out of the Wild" (shot in the mountains outside Las Vegas).

The game-changing musical project for Jean was 2013's *Color of Your Heart*, an album of instructive children's songs she composed for her kids inspired by the progressive all-star TV special and soundtrack spearheaded by actress Marlo Thomas, *Free to Be... You and Me* (1972). "I'd been living a second childhood through my kids as they went through theirs," Jean muses. "I started writing stuff for my kids from their point of view that gave expression to the experiences, challenges and solutions to problems that kids need – their tool kit for the world. The title track, 'Color of Your Heart,' states 'I don't care about the color of your eyes or the skin tone of your face. All I care about is the color of your heart.' That process grew me...gave me a chance to reflect, express and learn...and opened the door to my musical compositions. Writing adult songs first would have been too vulnerable for me. As my first foray into writing, it gave me courage."

Now upon the release of *For My Folks*, **Jean Louisa Kelly** will cross her next threshold: performing her songs before an audience. "As time goes by, I have an increased appreciation for the fact that time is going by," Jean concludes. "It's so easy to get caught up in life and all its demands – raising my kids and my acting career. I am acutely aware of how blessed I am. I want to make the most of my life. I recorded *For My Folks* as an expression of my love for my parents. Now is the perfect time for me to do it. I'm excited for them both to hear it."

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