



Former Ajacian sizzles as jazz singer

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August 28, 2011

AJAX -- Gillian Margot was a top student in high school, excelling in math and science.

So why did the former Ajax resident change direction and transform herself into a jazz singer and writer?

It started at the University of Guelph, when she met a big-band leader and "ex-hippie cornetist.

"He decided he wanted me to come sing with his band, even though they had never had a singer," she recalls.

Margot sang in a rehearsal and received an invitation to join the band full time. She gigged with them for eight months, eventually leaving the band, "overwhelmed by school".

But the die was cast and before long she transferred to York University, where she auditioned for and was accepted into the music and then the jazz program. It wasn't an easy decision. Margot calls it "a terrifying leap of faith for me," and it didn't help that a lot of people told her 'this is not something you do for a living'.

They underestimated her resolve.

"When I set my mind to something I'm going to do it," she says. "I thought, 'this is much more likely that I'm going to do this than to be in math and science'. I really enjoyed the singing and the learning about that."

One of her teachers at York was the legendary Oscar Peterson. And she took private lessons with jazz artist Carol Welsman. Her real education had begun. It was not as if she was a stranger to music and singing. Margot had trained as a classical pianist and comes from a musical family. She grew up listening to jazz played by her parents at home and sang in the choir at St. Bernadette's church in Ajax. But she had never taken singing all that seriously. It was time to get serious and get down to work.

"I was learning that everything I had learned in classical music I had to unlearn it to a certain extent to take in jazz theory," Margot says.

Fast-forward to when the Gillian Margot Trio, with pianist Stuart Harrison and double bassist Jordan O'Connor, released its first disc, *A Pink-Filled Sky*, last year. Margot invited an audience, including her parents, to an invitation-only concert. They and others saw that this was not "a bit of a dalliance" that wouldn't stand the test of time.



Former Ajacian sizzles as jazz singer. AJAX -- Gillian Margot, who was raised in Ajax, is making musical waves as a jazz singer after the release of 'A Pink-Filled Sky' last year. *Photo by R. Kelly Clipperton*

Margot says in choosing bandmates she didn't want mere accompanists backing her up, lurking somewhere in the shadowy background.

"I was looking for a really collaborative effort and these guys were perfect fits for that," she says.

The disc reveals Margot as a remarkable singer with a rich, mature voice. While she says the band wanted to maximize the original material on the disc and minimize the covers, the latter are outstanding: Duke Ellington's Mood Indigo is simply astonishing and Margot was born to sing eden ahbez's Nature Boy. But the disc features mostly original music written by Margot and O'Connor. Margot says they were both so busy that they would schedule three- to six-hour sessions, which they recorded, once a week to compose.

"We wanted it to be art in a lot of ways but we wanted it to be art that people wanted to listen to," she says.

The lovely January was one of the first songs they wrote.

"Jordan O'Connor started playing chords and I started improvising vocally," she says of its genesis.

Kiss was finished in 20 minutes. Margot had written some poetry and O'Connor noticed it. She recalls it was a very unlikely time in the session to get creative.

"It was at the end of the day and we were exhausted and we'd got on one another's nerves," she says.

Margot says the trio is her priority. However she is often asked to do "one-offs," single shows with a band that has no singer or for a special event.

The trio is preparing new material, alternating between gigging, writing and going into the studio to record.

"We've been doing quite a bit of writing," she says.

And learn more about Margot at www.gillianmargot.com, where you can hear several tracks, including Mood Indigo.

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