



Life with children inspires jazz mom

3:32 PM, Jun. 2, 2011 | Comments



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Written by Paul Clark

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Jennifer Ellis is one of the few jazz performers who's seeking a smaller audience.

Smaller in stature, not number. The Kenwood mother of two, rejecting the notion that jazz is strictly an adult taste, has recorded a children's album, "Rise & Shine...It's Time to Play!"

She'll roll it out for a CD release concert Saturday at the Blue Ash Nature Park Amphitheatre.

"I'm a professional jazz singer, that's my background," she says. "The title song is straight-up jazz. It gets the kids responding, jumping up and down."

Ellis wrote 10 songs for the album, with her vocals backed up by three Cincinnati-area jazzmen: Dan Karlsberg on keyboards, Dave

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Jennifer Ellis, a jazz singer and mom, introduces her new kids' CD at a free event this weekend in Blue Ash. / Provided photos

If you go

What: CD release concert for Jennifer Ellis's "Rise & Shine ... It's Time to Play!"

When: 10:30 a.m. Saturday

Where: Nature Park Amphitheater, 4433 Cooper Road, Blue Ash

Cost: Free

Ridenour on guitar and Bobby Sharp on drums. "It's geared for kids but something a lot of adults will enjoy," Ellis said.

The album does blend other influences: blues, pop, rock, even a dash of calypso.

"Every single song was inspired by my kids," she said. "One song is 'Bath Time.' I do it with an island-y feel."

The inspiration: "I would be in the bathroom with my son in the other room and I'd sing 'baaaath time' and he'd come crawling. Barney [the TV dinosaur] has a cleanup song, so if he can do it, I can do it."

Ellis, 36, grew up in South Florida. As a University of Florida student, she toured France with a 16-member chamber vocal ensemble. After graduation she and her identical twin Patty formed a band called Stirling and hit the road for club dates that included New York's Elbow Room, Atlanta's Hard Rock Café and the Roxy in Los Angeles.

Motherhood not only changed the direction of her life, but of her music, as she spent less time at center stage and more time on what she calls the sidelines.

"My life is on the sidelines now, with soccer practice and all," she said. "One song, 'I'm Proud of You,' definitely came from being on the sidelines."

Her sons are 7 and 5. Ellis' husband, Andrew Howell, is director of design and development for E.W. Scripps, a job that led the family to the Cincinnati area three years ago. Jennifer Ellis's gigs these days are family-oriented performances at places like the Children's

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Museum and Madeira Library. She also teaches weekly music classes at her son's preschool, St. Paul Nursery School in Madeira.

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"It's an inspiration every day being a mom," she says.

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The CD is available at her website, www.jenniferellismusic.com.

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