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In the Name of Love

By Mark Wyckoff, Time Out editor

The lights will be low. Wine will be poured. Love will be in the air. Sound's like the perfect way to spend Valentine's Day, right? Not quite for Oxnard singer-pianist Linda Fern Fay. Her view of the soft lights, sumptuous wines and cozy couples will come from the stage of Tony's Steak and Seafood in Ventura. While all the other lovebirds dine, it'll be her job to sit behind the keys and provide the soundtrack for the evening.

But you know what? Fay's not complaining. She's been performing at Tony's since 1981, and the popular restaurant feels like home to her now. Over the years, she's entertained people on their first dates, slowly watched those romances blossom over the course of return visits, then been filled with joy when the couples have gotten married. So, in a way, Fay considers it an honor to play on Valentine's Day, because there's a very real chance she could help two people fall in love that night.

"I enjoy making everyone's experience as romantic and poetic as possible," she said. "I want my music to elevate your sensations. Everything should smell better, taste better and sound better. I want everyone to experience the physical sensation of the music."

While her normal repertoire at Tony's is an eclectic mix -- everything from pop standards and instrumental selections to Latin numbers and jazz favorites -- she is, naturally, going to rely heavily on love songs Thursday night.

"They won't be cry-in-your-beer songs, either," she said. "They'll be timeless love songs."

Many such classics appear on her recently released debut C D, "Love Affair," a 12-song set she's selling at her Tony's gigs and through her own Web site, www.fayproductions.com.

The disc features her own arrangements of "Memory," "Wind Beneath My Wings," "Greensleeves," "Music Box Dancer," "Someone to Watch Over Me" and other tunes, along with a unique medley that weaves together Bach inventions and Simon & Garfunkel songs. The concept dates back to her junior high school days in the '60s.

"I was supposed to be at the piano, practicing, but my mind would wander," said Fay, who moved to Ventura from Maui in 1980. "I'd be playing a Bach piece and then think, 'Oh, it sounds sort of like this.' And Simon & Garfunkel were popular at the time, so I'd start playing them. I also have this philosophy that people who think they

don't like classical music really do -- they just don't know it. So pairing up classical pieces with pop songs that people are familiar with is my way of spoonfeeding the public classical music."

Thanks to a few well-placed friends, Fay was able to pull off quite a coup -- she got to record and master the album at Capitol Records' famed Hollywood and Vine studios. Just walking into the building gave her shivers because of the round tower's immense history; this was the same place, after all, used by such luminaries as Frank Sinatra, Peggy Lee and Dean Martin.

"I walked into this gorgeous wood panel studio and just got to be by myself for a while in this magnificent edifice," she said. "It was almost a religious experience."

Her first task was choosing which piano to use. She had her choice between a Yamaha that Bruce Hornsby likes to use and a Steinway that was a favorite of Nat King Cole. She ended up opting for the Yamaha.

"It was much more lyrical and responsive when it came to the classical things," she said.

Fay's husband, artist Don Fay, helped produce the CD with her and designed the cover art. The Oxnard residents have been married more than 20 years now. Don joins her twice a week at Tony's, playing vibraphone.

When Fay's not at Tony's, she's either teaching piano at Ventura College (she's been there four years) or playing the organ at First Presbyterian Church of Oxnard.

"I just have a love affair with music," Fay said. "That's why my husband told me to name the album 'Love Affair.' "

Even though her Valentine's Day evening will be spent at the piano, Fay isn't giving up on her own personal romantic notions. She's got an ace (of hearts, presumably) up her sleeve.

"Don and I are going to slip off to Paris late next month," she said. "We'll celebrate then."

LINDA FERN FAY

Linda Fern Fay is no longer appearing at Tony's Steak and Seafood, featured in the article above. Fay's debut CD, "Love Affair," is available on her web site, <http://www.fayproductions.com/>.

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