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Jazz great Diana Krall mixes many music styles

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
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Diana Krall, who'll perform in concert Tuesday night at the Embassy Theatre, loves music — all kinds of music.

From jazz greats Oscar Peterson, Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole and Miles Davis to crooners Bing Crosby to rock superstars Paul McCartney, Bob Dylan, Elton John and Peter Dinklage, Krall grew up listening to a wide variety of music, and it shows in her own music and stage performances.

Born in 1964 in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Krall is best known as a successful jazz pianist and singer, as well as wife of rock icon Elvis Costello since 2003.

An alumna of the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Krall started her recording career in 1993 with the release of her album "Stepping Out" on the Canadian jazz independent label Justin Time Records.

Since that time, she has gone on to release a series of best-selling albums (nine gold, three platinum and seven multiplatinum sellers), including "When I Look in Your Eyes," "The Look of Love," "Quiet Nights" and "Glad Rag Doll," as well as her current album, "Wallflower," which was released in February.

She is one of the most successful jazz artists of the past 25 years, winning five Grammy awards and selling more than 15 million albums worldwide, but her appeal has reached beyond the typical jazz listener.

Criticized by some for selling out to popular culture, Krall bristles at being pigeonholed as a performer of one specific genre and views herself as a musician who performs many different styles of music as opposed to being labeled strictly as a jazz or pop musician.

Her album "Wallflower," a top-10 album on the Billboard Top 200 album charts as well as the No. 1 album on the Billboard Top Jazz albums chart, is the perfect example of her not being tied into one style.

On the album, she takes a selection of pop songs from her youth — such as the 1970s classics "Superstar," "I'm Not in Love," "Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word" and "Desperado" — and reinterprets them with a more intimate, jazzy feel. Whether played as piano-driven ballads or lushly orchestrated in a traditional pop style, in Krall's hands these songs take on a much starker and plaintive atmosphere.

Krall was thrilled to be more of a vocalist on this album and enjoyed collaborating with David Foster, who produced and arranged the "Wallflower" album.

"He gave me a chance to just be in the vocal booth," Krall said in a telephone interview about recording album. "You know, not be so concerned with keys and playing the piano. He really put things into the perfect key for me to accompany me, to get the arrangements. He did a great job."

"'I'm Not in Love' is a song I've always known, and same with 'Superstar,' where there's kind of a James Bond kind of feel with it," Krall added. "I like those."

She also enjoyed interpreting close friend Elton John's song "Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word."

"Elton and I have been friends for a very long time, and I've always loved that record 'Blue Moves' (which includes "Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word") and that song," Krall said.

"There are so many great Elton John songs to listen to and play, and I just went back to that," she said. "David (Foster) and I went through a bunch of different things. We just did that live in the studio pretty much, and it just felt so good, ... I know the song so well."

Another song featured on "Wallflower" is a new Paul McCartney song, "If I Take You Home Tonight," which he wrote but did not record for his album "Kisses on the Bottom" from 2012, which featured Krall on piano.

Krall not only recorded "Kisses on the Bottom" with McCartney but also performed live with him to promote it, including performing live on the Grammy Awards, something that she says was very dear to her.

"Working with him (McCartney) was probably one of the greatest experiences of my life," Krall said. "We had a blast."

"It was a whole year from start to finish," she said. "To play with him on the Grammys, it was a huge honor. He's just an incredible artist and incredible person. I can't say enough how much that time meant to me."

Fans who go to her show at the Embassy will hear songs from "Wallflower" as well as a sampling of music from all of her albums and some surprises.



More Information

Jazz great

WHAT: Noted jazz artist Diana Krall performs in concert.

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday

WHERE: Embassy Theatre, 121 W. Jefferson Blvd.

COST: \$40, \$55, \$70, \$110. Tickets are available at the Embassy box office 10 a.m.-6 p.m. weekdays and before the show, at Ticketmaster outlets, www.ticketmaster.com and 1-800-745-3000.

"It's a big cross section of about 12 records that I've done," she said. "That's what makes it spontaneous and fun and great for the audiences, because they get to hear new stuff and old stuff, so it all works for everybody."

With a career filled with success and the ability to work with superstars such as McCartney, John and Barbra Streisand, Krall is grateful for her career and being able to achieve what seemed like an impossible dream.

The most satisfying aspects, she said, have been getting to play with people she dreamed of playing with since her childhood, playing with musicians she truly loves and admires, and sharing it with her children, family and parents.

"All of those things," she added, "all things that are based in love."