

CALIFORNIAN: Ducks, Angels and The Merc: Duquesnel can do it all

By Cam Miller - For The Californian |

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Peggy Duquesnel didn't swing a bat or power a puck, but for a sizable slice of her life both baseball and hockey played important roles in the jazz pianist and vocalist's career. She was house keyboardist for what were then known as the Anaheim Angels and Mighty Ducks at their respective playpens: Anaheim Stadium and Arrowhead Pond. While she wasn't in the employ of the National Hockey League Ducks during their championship year, Duquesnel was on the Angels' payroll in 2002, the year the American Leaguers won the World Series.

"I'm a sports nut so it was more fun than work," said Duquesne of the time she spent with the Angeles (six years) and Ducks (four years), both then owned by the Disney Corporation. "In addition to the ceremonial music, like the National Anthem, I also had a chance to play a lot of jazz between innings and breaks in the action."

The baseballing gig went down the tube when new owners of the Angel franchises elected to go with a deejay rather than employing both a keyboard player and a disc jock, leaving Duquesnel free to take other playing dates.

One of those dates comes up tonight at The Merc in Old Town Temecula where the Long Island, N.Y., transplant teams with Jim De Julio for a piano and bass fiddle concert. For Duquesnel it will be a couple of firsts: her initial appearance at The Merc and the first time she's played with DeJulio.

"Jim and I have tried to hook up several times but something has always stood in the way," said the pianist, "so this will be quite a treat for me."

It also should be quite a treat for DeJulio because his sidekick for the evening comes ready to play. With a degree in classical piano from Cal State Northridge and time spent on the U.S. and overseas jazz trails with vocalist Dionne Warwick, Duquesnel is a seasoned, versatile musician.

Now living in the Long Beach suburb of Signal Hill, Duquesne has still another dimension to her career. She's an adjunct professor of music at Concordia University, a Christian college nestled on a 40-acre spread in Irvine. It's a part-time job but during her time on campus, Duquesnel directs a jazz band and teaches jazz classes. And just as important to her career, the university has staged three major concerts on campus to showcase Duquesnel's talents since the attractive blonde musician first joined the staff in

2005.

"I have the best of all worlds," said Duquesnel, speaking by phone from her home, "I work at Concordia often enough to keep me on my toes but still have time to do other things."

Since she herself is a Christian and teaches at a Christian college, does she put any limits on what she will or won't sing?

"I won't sing any song that isn't appropriate for the occasion but if the circumstances are right, I would not rule out a song like Cole Porter's 'Let's Do It' because it's a classic jazz standard," she said. "On the other hand, I'd prefer not to sing 'Love For Sale' regardless of where I'm performing."

Her program at The Merc will be mainly well known jazz instrumentals and ballads as well as two songs in each of the two sets Duquesnel has written. And they are likely to come from an album of nothing but songs she has composed.

Playing piano, singing and composing professionally have grown out of a childhood interest in becoming a pianist.

"My parents are what I would call accomplished amateur musicians ---- Dad's a singer and Mom, a pianist ---- and by the time I started to take piano lessons when I was six or seven, I had already taught myself to play," said Duquesnel, who has recorded seven albums and had two songs she's written nominated for Grammy awards. "It was and still is my first love. I waited until after I was out of college before I began studying voice. You say my voice is hard to describe because of its unique qualities. I think you said it reminded you of a dry martini, whatever that means. All I know is that I'm an alto and enjoy singing."

If hanging a label on her voice is difficult ---- her major influences were Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, and Irene Kraal ---- it's a bit easier to hear how other pianists have shaped Duquesnel's approach to the instrument: a tad of Bill Evans' introspectiveness, an ample sample of Joe Sample's inventiveness, and splashes of Oscar Peterson's remarkable fleetness. All blended into a style that is Duquesnel's own.

The conversation was winding down when the subject of her experiences as a stadium keyboardist for two sports teams surfaced again.

"I was lucky to get the jobs because although I had worked for Disney, I was chosen for the Ducks in 98 only after I had gone through auditions twice, both times with 40 other seeking the opening," Duquesne said. "Landing the Angels job was easier because Disney management was familiar with my work with the Ducks."

"The only downside to either job was the fact that Disney went through entertainment directors like they were going out of style. And I had to adjust to each one. But, I can

always say I played the keyboard for the Angels' home games during the only World Series they've ever won. And I still get the warm fuzzies thinking about it."

Jazz at The Merc