

Eleanor McCain sings like my favourite Irish folk singers

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A joy to listen to

ELEANOR McCAIN'S NEW CD A CLASSIC 16-GEM TREASURE

If you attended the Sea Dogs game Nov. 5 in Saint John's Harbour Station you had the great good fortune of hear Eleanor McCain sing O Canada. Her brother Scott McCain is the team's CEO and majority owner. Now living in Ottawa, Ms. McCain has been a soloist with many of this country's great orchestras, sang before such famous personages as then Prime Minister Jean Chretien and Governor General Adrienne Clarkson and former U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Eleanor's new CD *Green Hills Of Home* is an an album of 16 gemstones set in an environmentally friendly fold-out jewel case.

But it was her father's presence at her recording of this, her third CD, she is most thrilled about.

"At 81 Dad in spite of a busy agenda and his on-going battle with pancreatic cancer was in the studio with me for a while during every phrase of it," she said.

Eleanor's dad is Wallace McCain of Maple Leaf Foods, who still owns a stake in McCain Foods of Florenceville.

"And the amazing thing about it is, my father who has such a astounding business mind is almost totally tone deaf. The music in our family all comes from my mother's side."

Starting from when Eleanor was 13, her mother Margaret would drive her to Fredericton from Florenceville weekly for voice lessons.

I mentioned having read that a Broadway musical *Annie*, based on a newspaper comic strip *Little Orphan Annie*, had been her early inspiration.

“Yes, *Annie*” she said almost reverently. “I couldn’t believe all those little girls on stage, no older than I was at the time, eight or nine, singing so beautifully.

“Our parents took us, the family, to New York to see it. We stayed with an aunt. After the show, playing with other family children in her backyard, I suddenly started singing songs from *Annie* and couldn’t stop. One of my cousins finally ran in to ask my mother to ‘come, stop Eleanor singing.’

“That night I resolved to make singing my life .”

And as well as her conservatory trained instantly engaging soprano voice, she has the look for that life today: blue eyed, blond, lithe, vibrant. As one Toronto journalist wrote of her: ‘when you drip elegance and poise as Ms. McCain does, even at 5 foot 6, you seem taller than anyone else in a room.’

“We were raised, my two brothers, a sister and I, to have a passion for whatever we do,” she said.” That you have to work hard, put 150% into everything. Both Dad and my uncle Harrison set that example for their families. I’m sure my father is proud of the dedication I’ve given to my music. He has been very supportive. He’d come to the studio whenever he could during the recording of my three albums especially this last.”

Wallace’s youngest child, she has always felt particularly close to him. The title song of her new CD, *Green Hills of Home*, a song she had written as a salute to him by eminent Canadian tune smiths Tim Thorney and Erica Ehm. It’s a slice of family history too, and was also on her 2001 CD *Intimate*.

*‘My father’s love is like an anchor / held us steady /
held us strong / a man so proud of his sons and
daughters/ where he lives we belong.’*

There’s a deep yearning in her voice, as she sings it, for the small rural home town of her childhood, Florenceville a peaceful community of 800 nestled in the green hills of the St. John River Valley. And of their move away from it in the mid-90’s:

‘The life that we had/ gone like a lover/ those green hills’

“We were afraid it would be hard for him to leave,” Eleanor said, “after 35 years of living and working in Florenceville, being so much a part of it. We were so relieved when he and mother settled so happily into the Toronto life style”.

“We go back to Florenceville often, of course. It’s still home to me. Several of my close friends from school still live there. And happily their children have become a big part of my daughter Laura’s life as well. So she looks forward to our visits there as much as I do.

“ I’m the youngest of four children. My mother, Margaret, is a classical pianist. She played the organ at church services when we lived in Florenceville and piano with me at events. She was such an important part of my music growing up. Then, graduating Bristol High I went to Mount Allison in Sackville to study classical music

Eleanor loves Placido Domingo’s voice and the passion he brings to each piece of music. She, also admires Cecilia Bartolis. But in her choice of songs for *Green Hills Of Home* her decision to treat each as folk repertoire rather than a classical art piece reminds me more of Eileen Farrell or Kathleen Ferrier, not in tone for Eleanor’s voice is more ethereal with no imperiousness in it, very warm and emotionally appealing.

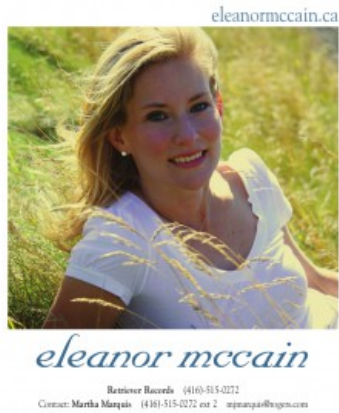
The traditional songs on it are Thomas Moore’s *Last Rose of Summer*, *Danny Boy*, *The Water Is Wide*, *Down By The Salley Gardens*, *Carrickfergus*, *Isle of Inisfree*, *Buachaill On Eirne*, *Skye Boat Song*, *Ash Grove*, Phil Coulter’s *Steal Away* and Robbie Burns’ *Ae Fond Kiss*.

Eleanor, on her first CD, teamed with John McDermott for a vocal duet on *Sweet Sixteen* and through him met two of Allister MacGillivray’s children. She has included three of Allister’s songs on this CD. *Song For The Mira*, *Away From The Roll of the Sea*, *Song of Peace* and Dougie MacLean’s *Ready For The Storm*, Beautifully, articulatively sung, they are 16 of the world’s most dearly loved songs. A great Christmas gift!

And one of NB’s most internationally famous musicians Ray Legere plays fiddle and mandolin on the CD: Anne Lindsay, violin, Les Allt, flute; Deborah Quigley, uilleann pipes; Erica Goodman, harp; John Marshman, cello. Producer and arranger Brigham Phillips added piano, accordion and backing vocals.

Near our conversations end, I asked “Have you ever read the Harry Potter books?”

There was a long pause.”Who have you been talking to?” she asked finally.



Eleanor McCain, a Florenceville girl at heart.

“No one,” I said “It’s just that in reading them the two brother’s Fred and George Weasley reminded me so much of your father and uncle when I worked with them at Thorne’s Hardware in Saint John early in the 1950’s. Always laughing, playing tricks, so beloved by everyone.”

“That’s so weird!” she laughed. “ My daughter Laura just loves those books. We’ve seen all the movies, too. We just saw *The Deathly Hallows*, first part, last week. We even went to Florida to visit the Wizarding World of Harry Potter when it opened at Universal Studios. She is sure she’ll receive an invitation in the mail to Hogwarts when she is elven”

Green Fields of Home and Eleanor’s other CD albums, *Intimate* and *Bundle Of Joy* (nominated for Children’s Recording Of The Year at the 2009 ECMA’s) can be ordered by phoning (416) 515-0272 or faxing (416) 926-8297 or visiting www.eleanormccain.ca.. If too late for Christmas delivery you can always leave an IOU note for the lucky recipient under the tree.