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1C

Levy's Silk River Music produces silky jazz sounds

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Gifted songwriter and longtime Ridgefield resident Bob Levy recently released his first CD, "Out in the Cold," a set of original jazz songs in the style of the old standards.

A lyricist with an interest in both jazz and country music, Mr. Levy tells stories through his words and music.

"I like jazz in the style of Sinatra and Torme, but mixed in are my own style and sense of irony," he said.

Released through his publishing company Silk River Music, "Out in the Cold" boasts his lyrics along with the styling of versatile country music and pop vocalist Perry Danos and award-winning singer Dane Vannatter.

"Perry sings 'Out in the Cold' to open the CD, and Dane closes," Bob Levy said.

Intelligence and care

Mr. Vannatter, who won the New York Music Critics' BackStage "Bistro Award" for outstanding male vocalist CD, is known for blending cabaret and jazz with "intelligence and care." He finds Bob's songs timeless.

"I don't want to sing a song about cell phones or the evils of SUVs," Mr. Vannatter said. "Bob's songs hearken back to the classical Great American Songbook writing when melodies were strong and the lyrics caressed the notes instead of squashing them like so many contemporary song lyrics do. His songs are satisfying to sing. They have a pulse, a propulsion, they make sense," he said.

Mr. Levy's blend of strong melody and lyrics is noteworthy since he doesn't read music or play an instrument. But he has a system that works. "I don't read or write music, but I do sing," he said. He found a good colleague in Jamie Whiting of Whiting Music and Nashville Tunes. "I

send a song to him and get back exactly what I'm looking for," Mr. Levy said.

The respect is mutual. "I've known Bob for six or seven years and have watched him grow from a fair to a great songwriter. But what has truly been phenomenal is his ability to hear melody lines and chord progressions in his head," Jamey Whiting said.

Since his teens

Mr. Levy has always had a song in his head and began writing while in his teens at the High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts in Manhattan. "I went because all my friends were going, and they were vocalists and musicians," he said. But at the time he wanted to be an artist. "I also wanted to be with my friends," he added.

He went on to study interior design at the Fashion Institute of Technology and Pratt Institute, then began working for Hallmark as a designer of retail stores. "I designed store interiors and facades," he said.

While at Hallmark, he was still writing. "I was working in Manhattan for a guy who knew Ronnie White," Mr. Levy said. White was a founding member of The Miracles, with Smokey Robinson. "Ronnie needed a lyricist because he was a composer," Mr. Levy said.

He wrote songs after work and on weekends and began getting introduced around.

But publication of his songs didn't happen right away. "Mercury Records recorded two songs, but they weren't released," Mr. Levy said. Though he continued writing, the songs remained on file with him. "If I did write, it went in the drawer."

He aspired to early retirement. "I thought, if I can get out of Hallmark in my early 50s, I'm going to write." He took advantage of a buyout opportunity and began writing.



Bob Levy was inspired by the philosophy of a songwriter he studied under. "I remember her saying that the way to success in this business is perseverance. You'll only be taken seriously if you take yourself seriously."

Own company

Now he has his own publishing company, Silk River Music. "When you publish your own work, you're in total control as to whom you send the song to. The royalties are all your own, too," he said.

The payback is the result of a keen work ethic, spurred on by a philosophy he learned while taking a songwriting course with Los Angeles-based songwriter Molly Ann Lichen. "I remember her saying that the way to success in this business is perseverance. You'll only be taken seriously if you take yourself seriously."

"Out in the Cold" is available from CDBaby.com, Amazon, iTunes, Napster, and Borders.