

Q&A

Singing dad emerges from daughter's shadow

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Mitch Winehouse, a former salesman and London cabby, is quick to admit that he is getting a shot at being a professional jazz singer at age 60 only because his daughter is Amy Winehouse, the British soul singer and songwriter.

But he also makes it plain that he thinks he can sing.



To hear him tell it, he is on a mission to unearth lovely but forgotten jazz and swing hits and introduce them to a new generation.

In April, he released an album of seldom-covered jazz tunes, as well as four originals by the British songwriter Tony Hiller, a family friend who produced the recording.

Rush of Love is an eclectic selection, from *Please Be Kind*, a 1938 number first performed by Mildred Bailey, to *How Insensitive*, the bossa nova classic by Antonio Carlos Jobim. He recently spoke about how he gave up his dream of becoming a singer in the 1970s in favor of a steady job and how his daughter's fame has given him a second chance.

Q: Is this your first work as a professional singer?

A: I wouldn't say I was a professional singer, more a semi-professional singer, when I was in my 20s and 30s. I stopped when I was about 30.

I was singing in clubs, local stuff, nothing special, and I really gave it up to look after the family because I wasn't making any money at it.

Q: How did Rush of Love come about?

A: The idea was to kind of resurrect these beautiful songs from the '30s, '40s and '50s, rather than doing the rat-packy-type stuff.

Amy and I sat down about three years ago, and we picked 40 songs that we both loved, and we took them to my pianist, and we ran through the 40 songs. We then reduced that to maybe 15 that we were going to do.

Q: This selection doesn't include many well-known standards. Why did you choose these particular songs?

A: I just loved the songs, and so did Amy. When we sat down, these songs were kind of special to her, too. She's got a fantastic knowledge of all these obscure jazz songs.

Q: Were there other musical people in your family?

A: My father played the mouth organ. My uncle played the squeeze box, the accordion. And another uncle played the piano.

On the other side, Amy's mom, Janice - we're divorced - she's got professional musicians in her family.

So you know all around there was music and dancing and singing, but in those days, I don't think that was special. I think everybody was doing that. They made their own entertainment at home.

Q: Often in life, it's the son or daughter trying to step out of the father's shadow. This situation seems a little reversed.

A: It's a lot reversed. What I've said is - and I'm being glib - it was my name first. I was here before Amy. But I know that I only got the chance to make the album because I was Amy's dad.

But the moment I stepped into the studio, Tony Hiller would have said to me, "You know what, you can't do this." No one was going to let me waste money just to do some karaokes.

Q: Has Amy come to see you perform?

A: Yes, of course, most shows when I'm in London. She always gets up onstage and refuses to rehearse. So we end up doing a couple of songs, which are terrible.

We just end up in fits of laughter.

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