

Versatile Talent Chiara Izzi to Enchant "Birdland"

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The Italian award winning singer-songwriter and internationally acclaimed pianist and vocalist Kevin Hays will celebrate the release of their album "Across the Sea," a visionary journey between jazz and pop, America and Italy, dream and lyricism. At the Birdland Jazz Club on February 28 at 5:30 pm.

Italian singer **Chiara Izzi** confirms to be a talent not to be missed with her second album, "Across The Sea," a cooperative project with pianist **Kevin Hays**. The multi-lingual, pan-stylistic 10-tune recital, released on February 22, comprises original pieces and lyrics by each protagonist and highly personalized interpretations of songs from composers and songwriters who both artists love and admire.

Izzi and Hays will celebrate their album, produced by Italian label Jando Music, in collaboration with Via Veneto Jazz, at Birdland Jazz Club on February 28 at 5:30pm (click [here](#) [2] for tickets and reservation).



How the "Across The Sea" collaboration started

The back story of "Across The Sea" dates to 2006, when Hays played a concert in Izzi's hometown, Campobasso, the capital of the Molise region of southeastern Italy, with his then-working-trio with bassist Doug Weiss and drummer Bill Stewart. After the concert, Izzi, then a university student majoring in communications and media who was beginning her career as a professional musician, approached Hays with a request to sign her copy of the trio's CD, For Heaven's Sake.

The next step came when Izzi, by now an established bandleader based in Rome, made her international debut at the 2011 **Montreux International Jazz Festival Vocal Competition**, where **Quincy Jones** awarded her first prize. With the award came the 2012 recording session that generated Izzi's well-received debut album, *Motifs (Dot-Time)*, an 11-track program that includes lyrics in English, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. Accompanied by her accomplished rhythm section of several years, Izzi navigated the American and Brazilian Songbooks, Tango, high-level Euro-Pop, and Mainstream Jazz Vocalese and Scat, addressing each idiom on its own terms of engagement, deploying her prodigious vocal instrument, refined musicianship and inherent soulfulness to convey emotional transparency and ebullient swing in equal measure.

Meanwhile, Izzi was focusing on finding a path to New York City. She recalls: "During the celebration after the finals, Quincy Jones told me, 'You should go to the U.S. You have to improve your craft, because you are very talented.' Before that, I believed in myself and enjoyed my music. But that encouraged me think bigger."

Moving to New York

Izzi made the move in August 2014. Not long thereafter, she cold-called Hays to play duo with her at a midtown Manhattan club. At first blush, it might have seemed counterintuitive that Hays would accept. Then 46, he'd garnered international renown over a 25-year career, accumulating a leader discography of some 20 albums and a sideman c.v. that includes consequential tenures with Chris Potter, Benny Golson, Eddie Henderson, Bob Belden and Joshua Redman. At the time, he was just forming his trio with Jost and Joseph, who play on his recent trio albums *New Day* and *North*.

"I had a sense, and I wasn't doing anything at the moment, so I said, 'Let's try it,'" Hays recalls. Both artists had fun. They decided to keep playing together. "I thought she had something special," Hays says. "There was a sense of sincerity and honesty — a lack of artifice. She has an inner strength that I think is rare. I said, 'We should work on some music.'"

An enriching collaboration

Recorded in August 2017, "Across The Sea" documents the intuitive, spontaneous *simpatico* that Izzi and Hays established since that initial encounter. "We share an open-minded approach, with a similar appreciation and love for artists belonging to different genres," Izzi says. "Our collaboration is an example of different musical worlds that meet and build something new. When we were both around, we'd get together regularly with new stuff to try. Most of our meetings focused on experimentation with the lyrics, deciding which language suited which song. For example, on 'Viaggio Elegiaco,' I contributed to Kevin's music with Italian songwriting. In fact, for several songs from the album we wound up having versions of the lyrics in two different languages for the same song, and it was hard to decide which one to keep because we liked both."

This collaboration enriched both artists but Izzi admits: "Kevin has played the role of a mentor for me. He pushed me to go over the limits of my singing, of my songwriting skills. Very often I brought something, and he'd say, 'Ok, that's good; let's try to do it a different way now.' At first, I'd say, 'Really?', but the effort paid off."

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