

# Fundraising concert marks reunion for musical family

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

She's recorded in Nashville, TN, headlined at Casino Windsor and had a number one hit on the independent music charts.

But a local performance on April 22 by the Music Express Premiere Show Band will give Essex singer Maria Connel an extra special opportunity — the chance to get back to her roots.

Connel, 43, will appear on stage for two songs with the band during their show, A Gospel Celebration, at Holy Name of Jesus Parish.

She will be accompanied by her brother Nino Palazzolo, the band's director, and her two sisters, Tina Fabischek and Joanne Ross, who are both members of the 30-piece orchestra.

Connel is hoping to raise around \$7,000 during the event, with all proceeds going toward the purchase of a new Clavinova key-

board to be used by the church.

"This is going to be a reunion of sorts with my family," Connel said. "I see them all the time but I don't get to work with them anymore. This will be the first time I will get to sing with the group in three years. This is kind of cool for me to be a guest performer."

Connel will be giving a sneak preview of the two numbers — Friend of a Wounded Heart and Send it on Down — during mass at Holy Name of Jesus Parish on April 15.

The music's upbeat, contemporary vibe is what attracted Connel to A Gospel Celebration. The chance to sing alongside members of her family was the icing on the cake.

"We all grew up with music in the whole house," Connel said. "Now, when you see the Palazzolo kids in the same room in the same show it really is a treat. I'm



MARIA CONNEL

not boasting but I'm just saying, there is a tremendous amount of talent. It's a shame we can't be like the Partridge Family in a band, but in reality it just doesn't

work that way. Everybody has got their own lives and their own responsibilities. So this is a really huge deal for me to be able to come back and perform with the group. As a musician, it's really fulfilling to go back to your roots."

In 2003, Music Express performed a fundraiser concert for Holy Name of Jesus Parish that raised \$4,500 towards the million-dollar expansion on the church.

At the time, Connel worked as vocal director for Music Express, but as her own professional career became increasingly demanding, she was forced to leave the group.

As an international performer, Connel has spent the past few years on a busy touring schedule, singing both Canadian and Italian music. Last week, she signed a deal with a Bahamas resort and will be performing a series of shows from May 21-25.

She is hoping it will lead to regular gigs as a guest performer on a cruise ship and she's already produced a show titled O Canada, a tribute to homegrown superstars such as Shania Twain, Celine Dion and Anne Murray.

"I would basically work one week a month, doing an hour show every night on the cruise ship and that would be cake for me," Connel said. "Then I can be home in my little town of Essex, which I love. In fact, in the O Canada tribute, my first line is, 'Greetings from Essex, Ontario, Canada,' and you know the whole audience is asking, 'where the heck is that?' So I play on the joke that it's a small town and I love that."

To catch Connel and the rest of Music Express on stage at Holy Name of Jesus Parish April 22, call her at 519-776-7812 or the church office at 519-776-8483. General admission is \$10.

## Woodland conservation focus of spring walk

On Sunday, April 29, a guided woodland walk will be held at 2:00 p.m. in the woodland owned by brothers Bill Balkwill and Jack Balkwill of the Town of Kingsville. This 47-acre woodland has lanes that provide good walking conditions as well as an opportuni-

ty to view surrounding trees and flowering spring plants.

The Balkwill's Carolinian woodland has both dry and wet areas with a diversity of tree species including a remarkable towering Burr Oak. Over 290 plant species have been identified within the woodland with 20 plant

species identified that are regionally, provincially or federally rare.

The woodland is situated within the Cedar Creek watershed, which is recognized by the Nature Conservancy of Canada and The Nature Conservancy (U.S) as significant for their biological diversity of plants, mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians.

The floral display in the Balkwill woodland is expected to include Yellow

Trout-Lily, Spring Beauty, Common Trillium, Marsh Marigold and many other species.

In addition to the woodland, natural heritage on the Balkwill property includes an old moss covered laneway that is a remnant of a logging road that passed through the area in the nineteenth century providing access to two nearby mills. Recently a shallow pond has been excavated with a tall grass prairie restoration site established nearby.

Bill Balkwill and Jack Balkwill are presently working in partnership with the Canada South Land Trust to place a conservation agreement on the natural heritage of their lands for the purpose of conserving the woodland, wildlife habitat and natural features. A legal document has been drawn up which will be registered on title. Present and future owners will be bound by restrictions that were selected to conserve the natural heritage of the Balkwill lands in the

long term.

The Canada South Land Trust is a conservation charity formed in September 2001. It is able to accept ecological gifts such as the conservation agreement on the Balkwill lands under Environment Canada's Ecological Gift Program. The Canada South Land Trust is dedicated to preserving natural areas in Essex County and the Municipality of Chatham/Kent for future generations.

For more details regarding the woodland walk, call Betty Learmouth at 519-944-0825.



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