



Bing Crosby manor owner hosting Tony DeSare concert

By Jesse Hamlin | March 15, 2017 | Updated: March 15, 2017 2:30pm



Photo: Courtesy Jazz At The Ballroom



Tony DeSare performs at Jazz at the Ballroom, a concert series in the Hillsborough home Bing Crosby once owned.

A chauffeur no longer lives in the quarters above the garage, and **Suzanne Roche** and her family don't employ a raft of cooks, housekeepers and gardeners like **Bing Crosby** did when he owned their English country manor in the San Mateo County town of Hillsborough.

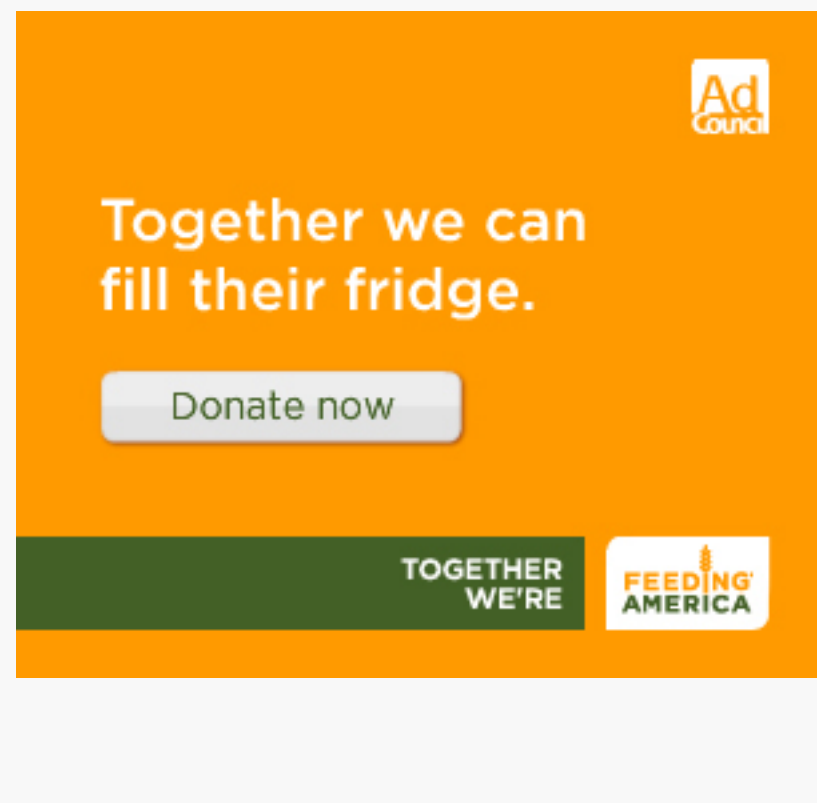
But the ballroom in the wood-beamed mansion — where Crosby undoubtedly crooned a few tunes while living at the estate with his clan in the 1960s and '70s — is being actively used by Roche, a children's book and travel writer who's producing jazz concerts there and recording some of them live for the nonprofit organization and label she started.

On Saturday, March 18, singer/pianist **Tony DeSare**, a young **Sinatra**-style swinger who plays clubs and symphony halls, performs with his trio in the 100-seat ballroom, which looks out to the oak-studded grounds through leaded-glass windows.

The invited audience includes people Roche connected with through SFJazz and other arts patrons, or those who heard about it through word-of-mouth. Depending on how many RSVP, she expects a couple of dozen seats could be available for the free concert through Jazz at the Ballroom's [website](#).

DeSare arrives Friday, March 17, to record a "White Christmas" duet with Bing's widow, **Kathryn Crosby**, who still lives in the area, for a Jazz at the Ballroom holiday disc featuring artists who've performed there or will in the coming months.

They include the singing guitarist **John Pizzarelli**, who inaugurated the salon series last fall; singer **Jane Monheit**, who records a live album at the ballroom in May; bopping San Francisco vocalist **Kitty Margolis**, who performs in June; and artists appearing next season — when the ballroom will sell subscriptions to shows that Roche has been underwriting — among them the venerable singer/pianist **Freddy Cole** and the young Canadian trumpeter and



singer **Bria Skonberg**.

“I’m a huge jazz fan,” says Roche, a New Yorker who moved into the Hillsborough house two years ago with her husband, a Silicon Valley management consultant for McKinsey & Co., and their four children.

She had no intention of producing jazz shows in her home. But after hiring DeSare for a fundraiser there for Stanford’s Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital last year, something clicked. And she was annoyed people weren’t listening to the music.

“People were talking the whole time, and it drove me crazy,” says Roche, on the phone from New York, where she was recording tracks for the Christmas album.

She talked with DeSare about how to set things up so people would drink and schmooze outside, then come into the room to listen. Before long, Roche was putting on house concerts every couple of months.

“I love vocalists because they engage the audience. They bring in people to the music who might not be huge jazz lovers,” she says. “I’m a sucker for standards. These are artists who are keeping standards alive.”

Roche has received some contributions from other patrons, and next season will sell concert subscriptions to support the ballroom and its effort to help music in schools.

“With the first season winding down, it’s nice to have other people chip in,” says Roche, who’s planning seven or eight concerts for next season and figures that subscriptions for the lot will start around \$1,000.

It’s a price considerably steeper per show than SFJazz or Yoshi’s in Oakland, but it’s worth it, she points out, considering the extras that come with a concert in the acoustically warm ballroom once owned by Bing.

“You don’t have to deal with parking, you get a catered cocktail party, an open bar and a fantastic seat in the ballroom,” she says. “It’s not a show, it’s an experience.”

For more information, go to www.jazzattheballroom.com

Beach Blanket scholarships

San Francisco's **Steve Silver Foundation** and "Beach Blanket Babylon" are giving \$45,000 — \$15,000 each for an actor, dancer and singer — to Bay Area high school seniors competing in the 15th annual Scholarship for the Arts program.

Based on three-minute performance tapes, three artists in each discipline will be picked by a panel of pros to perform in the finals June 5 at Club Fugazi. Applications must be postmarked or uploaded by 11:59 p.m. April 28.

For more information, go to www.beachblanketbabylon.com/scholarship

Irish swing

East Bay singer-songwriter **Melanie O'Reilly**, a Dubliner who merges Celtic music and jazz, celebrates St. Patrick's Day with a show Sunday, March 19, at Albany's St. Albans Church. She'll be expertly backed by pianist **Frank Martin** and bassist **Fred Randolph**, with flutist **Jane Lenoir** chiming in on a few tunes.

For more information, go to www.melanieoreilly.com

Jesse Hamlin is a Bay Area journalist and former San Francisco Chronicle staff writer.

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