CLARA BELLINO LONG BIO

A delightful singer-songwriter with a memorable story to tell, Clara Bellino emerged from France to become an important contributor to the American music scene. Her latest CD, This Is Happiness – Hand In Hand, not only features her newest song “This Is Happiness” and a memorable duet with the late and legendary Bobby Sharp (best known for “Unchain My Heart”) but also two videos and a documentary.

Clara Bellino was born in Paris, France, spent two years in the United States starting when she was five, and grew up in a small village of the French Alps. “I always loved music and wrote lyrics early on. When I was seven, I entered a conservatory, singing in the choir, studying classical piano for ten years and classical guitar for five. I also took a couple of years of jazz piano. Music brought me to the United States. I wanted to perform my own music and in France I felt as if I was stuck. The choices were to become a pop variety artist who had to have a hit in order to get on television, or to play classical or jazz. I felt that there were a lot more options to grow in music in the U.S.”

Clara was accepted into the Berklee School of Music when she was 16 but her parents felt that she was too young and she had to reluctantly turn down the offer. When she was 17, she moved to California where she started composing music to the lyrics she had written earlier. Clara took music classes at Foothill College, started her first group, and played bass in a reggae band. She gained a great deal of experience performing at a wide assortment of bars and clubs in San Francisco. At her parents’ request, she agreed to work towards a degree in France so she would have something to fall back on. Clara earned an MA in English and languages by spending a year in France and then returning to the U.S., flying back to France just to take the exams. “I felt that it made more sense for me to be on the West Coast playing music than to be attending tedious classes at the University.”

Since 1992, Clara has worked in many films (including starring as a singer in the 1993 feature film, Steal America) and commercials, and she has had extensive voiceover work, but music has always been her main passion. She led a band called the Flying Monkeys for several years and, when the group was disbanding, she recorded her first solo CD, Flying Monkey. In 2005 Clara recorded “Come And Stay With Me” for a compilation album (Juxtamusician) put out by a label from Austin, Texas. The single was also included in her next CD, Embarcadero Love.

“When I first came to the States, I wanted to perform what I called ‘sophisticated funk.’ By the time I recorded Embarcadero Love, I had been playing with most of the same musicians for several years. They were the band of my dreams. It was an all-black band comprised of former members of Tower Of Power, Sly & The Family Stone and the Commodores. Embarcadero Love is an eclectic set of music that I call ‘soulful pop.’”

Embarcadero Love was recorded while Clara was living on a sailboat moored at Embarcadero Cove in San Francisco Bay. In addition to including distinctive and original versions of songs by Tom Waits, Smokey Robinson, William Barnes (the classic “Something Cool”) and Jackie DeShannon (“Come And Stay With Me”), this colorful set has six of Clara’s best compositions.

She sings with enthusiasm in French on the danceable “Tout Est Fini”, and discusses the difficulties of a long distance romance (“Goodnight Baby”), the futility of war (“Peaceful Solution”), ending a love affair (“Game Up – Bigger Pickle”), and moving to another country (“Potential Criminal”). “Big Picture” is about the joy and adventure of living your own life, making up your own picture, and playing the part that best fits you. Throughout Embarcadero Love, the offbeat lyrics, highly original way of looking at life, quietly emotional vocals and fine backup band make this a memorable and very accessible set.

Clara Bellino’s new CD came about in a roundabout way. “I wrote ‘This Is Happiness’ when I was in a tiny village in France where my brother and his wife own a farm. I played it in different places including a church and at a show in Paris, and it evolved. I initially just wanted to record a CD single.” Clara started working with producers Greg Sankovich (who plays all of the keyboards on “This Is Happiness”) and Lincoln Adler (who takes a beautiful soprano solo on “Hand In Hand” and tenor on “This Is Happiness”). Bobby Sharp had given Clara “Hand In Hand” several years earlier. Sharp originally wrote “Hand In Hand” in 1947 and over 15 years later Nat King Cole expressed interest in it. However Cole passed away and the song went undiscovered and unrecorded, until now. “Bobby Sharp and I had the same landlord who originally introduced us. We got to be good friends, he’s 87, and I talk to him every day. He had so much fun recording the piano track and being in the studio that I wanted him to be on the project. It was a pleasure working with him and he always has wonderful stories to share.”

The project expanded and the finished CD is full of high points. The set opens and closes with the catchy and exuberant “This Is Happiness,” a tune about the joy found in simple pleasures. It will certainly have audiences singing along. “Hand In Hand,” which is about a different type of happiness, that of love, is also heard twice with one version being a vocal duet by Clara and Bobby Sharp. Heard as a transition between songs is Sharp’s pretty instrumental “Driftwood.” As a special bonus to this enhanced CD, also included are highly appealing videos of “This Is Happiness” and “Hand In Hand” plus an informal documentary about the great Bobby Sharp.

Clara has been playing shows, showcases and benefits in Northern California including at the Great American Music Hall, The Paradise and most recently Café Du Nord. She looks forward to having a West Coast tour upon the official release of This Is Happiness – Hand In Hand.

Clara Bellino is a talent well worth discovering.