

portuguese TRIBUNE

Serving the Portuguese-American
Communities since 1979

August 15th, 2007



Ideiafix

Miguel Valle Ávila

miguelvalleavila@tribunaportuguesa.com

Grande Entrevista with Gustine recording artist Kathryn Maffei:

"I'm now convinced that the Festas will go on forever"

Who is Kathryn Maffei? Where were you born and raised? What are your educational and professional backgrounds?

I grew up in California's Central Valley in a small Portuguese community called Gustine. Many of the original immigrants who came to our town were from the Azores Islands, including my parents' families who came from Terceira. First and foremost, I am a wife and mother. I am married to Lou Maffei for 39 years and we have three grown children, Andrea, Lisa, and Roy. I have been studying music since I was a small child, taking piano lessons starting at the age of 8 from a concert pianist. Over the past 32 years, I have enjoyed working with choirs and local bands, schools and community theater organizations, the church and Festas, honing my craft. I enjoy performing a variety of music styles, and over the years I have recorded 8 CDs. Four relate to Portuguese songs. Today, I teach music to students at the Our Lady of Miracles School in Gustine, a school I attended as a child.

How and why did you get involved with the Our Lady of Miracles celebration in Gustine, CA?

Because I grew up in a Portuguese home – my parents, Matt and Isabella Castro, were first generation Americans and spoke Portuguese with their parents – I attended local Festas as a child. As a young girl, I was a senior side-maid (along with my sister) to one of the queens for the Gustine Pentecost Society's Festa. My mother and father were very active in the Our Lady of Miracles Festa, and my parents served as President of that Festa twice.

As a child, I sang in the novenas, which are 9 days of prayer before the actual Festa itself. It was then that I learned the OLM hymns and grew to love the melodies. I would work for hours playing the songs by ear on my piano at home. In fact, one of the main reasons my mother encouraged me to play the piano was for me to learn the OLM hymns and the "Chamarita." After about 10 years of piano lessons, I was determined to one day record the OLM hymns and the "Chamarita" for her and my father.

What is your fondest memory of the Our Lady of Miracles Festa?

I have so many wonderful memories it's hard to choose just one. As a young girl, I loved going to the dances and meeting

old and new friends. It was an event my whole family looked forward to every year. We got new dresses for the occasion and it was, in general, the happiest of times for all of us. Even when my father wasn't serving as President, he was still very active in the OLM Festa organization. One of his many jobs was to call all the cities, one-by-one, as they lined up for the Festa Procession, a parade down the middle of town. If I close my eyes, I can still hear him calling out to the different cities to get them in line for the procession.

Another, more recent, memory was in 1998 when my CD, A Collection of Our Lady of Miracles Hymns, came out. It was played on KLBS radio, which was a real thrill for me to hear. At that year's Festa, the most wonderful thing happened to me: during the Candlelight Procession (when the statue of Our Lady of Miracles is carried into the park, lit only by candles carried by thousands of people) they played my version of the song, "Hozana," over the public address system. Spontaneously, the huge crowd started to sing! I will never forget that moment. I felt as though I had offered my music to Our Lady and she smiled upon me right then. I cried and cried, thinking, "If nothing else ever happens with my music, this moment is worth every effort I made to record it." That moment still moves me today.

When and why did you decide to publish a music CD with hymns to Our Lady?

The songs are gorgeous, and I never want them to be forgotten. Quite frankly, I was concerned that one day we might lose these beautiful and historical hymns if they were not recorded. I had thought about recording them for years, but it always seemed like a dream that was out of reach for me. Then, with the help of the Internet, I learned how to produce my own music. After much research, I copyrighted the songs, since no one had done so, and I now feel that I was put on earth as a custodian to preserve and protect the music of the Our Lady of Miracles Festa for generations to come.

What has been the response to your music CD? How many units have you sold?

I cannot tell you how great the response has been! The CD was published in 1998 – nearly a decade ago – and it still continues to be popular today. I have sold over

1,500 units, but have also given many more away to the ill and to convalescent hospitals over the years. I often get wonderful letters from people whose sick rela-



tives listened to the music until they passed away. That is my true satisfaction.

How did you get listed on Apple's iTunes music store and other online music stores such as CDBaby.com, MusicIsHere.com, PassAlong.com, Pay-Play.com, and GroupieTunes.com?

The company I worked with to record and publish my CD offered those services. With today's technology, music online is the norm rather than the exception. Personally, I get a real thrill knowing my music is listed among other musicians' music that I admire and enjoy.

When and why did you decide to publish the website www.ourladyofmiracles.com?

I realized in 1998 that the Internet was the best way to tell the world about the unique and local customs surrounding the OLM Festa, so I created a Web site. I invite your readers to visit the site at www.ourladyofmiracles.com and sign the guestbook (the letters are my favorite part). To date, I have had over 100,000 hits on the site. It includes information about the OLM Festa – dates, times, events, places to stay for out-of-town

guests, and much, much more. Most importantly, it includes the history of the Festa, including a list of all the past-presidents since its inception, as well as all the senior and junior queens. I update it regularly and recently added a 20-minute slideshow to the site.

What other involvement do you have in the Portuguese-American community?

Sometimes I play the piano for the Festas, from the first novena to the High Mass at which they crown the queens. It's quite an ordeal and requires many hours of practice. I also play the organ at Our Lady of Miracles Catholic Church for weddings, funerals, Catholic school events – any kind of celebration for Portuguese-American families, as they always request OLM hymns. I feel fortunate that the music I play is part of the personal "soundtrack" to many Portuguese-Americans' lives.

What do you see as the future of the Our Lady of Miracles Festa in Gustine?

That's quite an interesting question and makes me smile because when I was a little girl, I would tell my mother that this "Festa thing" was never going to catch on. I told her people in my generation would never keep this up. Boy, was I wrong! The Festa is like a huge family reunion each year. Many people say as they are leaving, "See you next year!" Today, I smile when I see a former classmate becoming President and being involved in the Festa. I am now convinced that the Festas will go on forever, but it's up to each Portuguese-American family to stress how important the Festas are in preserving our heritage, our religion, and our community.

What message do you want to leave for the readers of The Portuguese Tribune?

Now that I am almost 60 years old, I have grown more philosophical about the importance of our heritage on our families and our community. I hope all Portuguese-American families will celebrate our wonderful traditions, including our Festas, our faith, our language, our food, and our customs. I want us to be proud Portuguese-American people and to pass the gifts of our culture on to the next generation.

Website:

www.ourladyofmiracles.com

10000 Challenge - Campanha dos 10000



Join us in bringing more content and even better quality to the oldest Portuguese bilingual newspaper on the West Coast. **Subscribe TODAY for only \$40/year!**

Name/
Nome: _____

Address/
Morada: _____

City/
Cidade: _____

Zip Code/
Código Postal: _____

Phone/
Telefone: (____) _____-_____

Email: _____

Mail to:

The Portuguese Tribune- PO BO-579866- Modesto - CA 95357-5866
or call 209.576.1951