Pamela Woods ’74 prepares to ‘Come home again’ for special concert event

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FREEPORT, Grand Bahamas -- Almost 30 years and 1,600 miles separate Freeport from a chance event – but music lovers on Grand Bahamas will get the benefit on November 13th.

Those were the days when a homesick student from Nassau at the leading Catholic women’s college in the US used to try to banish her sadness by banging away on an old piano in the college social centre. A passing Benedictine sister heard her, took her under her wing, and a 30-year professional singing and playing career was born.

Since then Pam Woods has played at venues in Japan, Russia, Dubai, Switzerland, Canada and the UK as well as teaching generations of young people, some of whom have turned professional themselves, the beauty of music. And Freeport’s Regency Theatre will be the backdrop for her latest concert, on November 13th.

Her mix of jazz and gospel will be the centerpiece of a performance of music, song and dance from a wide variety of performers in “Home Again - An Evening with Pam Woods and Friends”.

Pam recalled of her days at St. Benedict’s College, in Saint Joseph, Minnesota: “There was a rickety old piano. I played it and sang, anytime day or night, and it was healing. There are those times where you can’t explain why you are lonely, and I would play and sing at the top of my lungs. Just belt it out.

“Then, Sister Marie decided to pull the music out of me. She gave me voice lessons. I didn’t know I could sing. At Saint Ben’s, I learned to sing in Latin, German and French. When the door opens, you have to go through it. Saint Ben’s was that door for me.

“Saint Benedict’s gave me life. I was the girl – like any girl on the island – who could have been here her whole life with eight kids, no education, no money, and her only hope is for her children. That’s a lot going against the grain. I would not be one of the many numbers with little hope.

“The sheer belief that the Sisters at Saint Benedict’s had in me, when I think about it, was the gift of God.”

It certainly turned out that way with Pam, one of seven children, launching an international career as an entertainer in five-star hotels usually as a resident solo performer but also sometimes
leading a small group. She still is seen at the Colonial Hilton in Nassau in that role but has done concert work too, including the concluding event in the summer concert series at the capital’s National Gallery last year.

The audience at the Regency event, which starts at 8pm, can expect a toe-tapping treat. One of Pam’s skills is helping the audience drop its inhibitions. “People are going to hear every mood and emotion. It will be a trip down Memory Lane for many – music which will take their minds through emotions and reminiscences,” said her daughter Wandrea Rolle.

Wandrea, herself a full-time music teacher at St Paul’s College in Freeport and a tutor at her Woods’ Music Academy, will be among those on stage. Others will include Ossie Hall and Ralph Munnings, both playing sax, Michael Wilchcombe, Donald Glass both playing guitar and Leslie McDonald (trombone).

The night will contain a selection from Ain’t Misbehavin’ performed by Methice Rigby, Dora Brown, Kenton Pinder, and Alessandro Major – a taster for the full show being presented by Freeport Players’ Guild next February. Dance will include Sheena and A. J. Forbes strutting their stuff to Pam Woods’ version of I Got Rhythm. Individual soloists include Shelley Carey, Paula La Plant and Trevor Bethel.

The Lois Seiler Dancers and GB Players will complete the bill on what will probably be the biggest night so far for the organisers, the Grand Bahama Society for the Performing Arts. The society was launched with enormous acclaim last year and is devoted to raising money for performing artists throughout the island. All proceeds from this show go to that cause.

Tickets can be obtained from the Seventeen Shop, Italian Speciality Imports and Island Java for $35.

Photo 1: Talented local musicians rehearse with Pam Woods in preparation for 'Home Again - An Evening with Pam Woods and Friends' at the Regency Theatre, November 13th.

Photo 2: Tuning up their voices - Singers from the upcoming production of Ain't Misbehavin' will join Pam Woods at the Regency Theatre, November 13th for 'Home Again - An Evening with Pam Woods and Friends.'

Photo 3: Talented pianist Pam Woods will join with many wonderful local singers and dancers November 13th for 'Home Again - An Evening with Pam Woods and Friends.'

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