

Four Celtic Voices CD release: Four Celtic Seasons

September 3-9, 2014 – The Irish Echo

MUSIC NOTES by Colleen Taylor

The Celtic and the classical easily coalesce. Just ask singer Celeste Ray, who naturally pairs the two genres. “There's a huge correlation between classical and Celtic music, and people don't realize [it]” Ray said. “There's just a little difference in rhythm and style.” Ray recalls that it was easy for her to transition to Celtic music from her classical background. Now interpreting Celtic music with a classical style is the hallmark of Ray's group, Four Celtic Voices – an American quartet who has adopted Irish and Scottish music as their genre. Today, Four Celtic Voices – made up of Ray, Alison Crossley, Carol Crittenden, and Maria Banks – are gearing up for a tour to coincide with the launch of their album, “Four Celtic Seasons.”



Although Celeste Ray grew up in a musical family, it was through her own initiative and exploration that she discovered the music of Ireland. Before her Eurotrip, Ray studied classical music and listened to jazz, but time spent in Ireland turned her study to Celtic history and culture. Ray displays a passion for the centuries-old history of the genre. She finds integrity in her group's blend of the classical and the Celtic: “We focus on the classical, historical background of the songs.” This is an endeavor she finds appropriate because many of the old folk songs can be traced to a historical environment of classical music. “Robbie Burns, for instance, was involved with classical music,” Ray said.

Four Celtic Voices sing folk songs familiar to anyone with an Irish background or interest. What they offer are slight alterations to the historical renditions. “We're a mix of traditional and modern. We add little bass and rhythm to bring Celtic music into the modern realm,” Ray described. The four women play a number of instruments, from flutes and harps, to piano and an instrument with ancient roots, the psaltery. They pride themselves on their live performances, which include an informative outreach program designed for school children and a more standard concert performance.

The formation of this group of women was organic and unforced. Ray met Crittenden when she moved to New York, and the two encountered Crossley and Banks along the paths of their careers. Their self-titled album debuted as number one on the World Music Charts in 2009, and now their second album, “Four Celtic Seasons” (released in August) thematically groups traditional songs in accordance with the four seasons.

Ray feels the next few months may be the best yet for Four Celtic Voices: “We're excited to get some airplay and tour all around the country this year.” Hopefully the magic of the Celts and the charms of classical art will join them on the road.