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ARTS ENTERTAINMENT ARCHITECTURE

By dallasnews Administrator

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It's A Lamb Chop Celebration! everyday for Mallory Lewis

Dallas holds good memories — and lots of family — for Mallory Lewis, who will be performing A Lamb Chop Celebration! at the Wyly Theatre on Dec. 15.

This is the city that helped build her confidence when she picked up the puppet that her late mother, Shari Lewis, made famous on television and stage, she says. For that she thanks her cousin, Elya Naxon. Naxon convinced the Jewish Community Center of Dallas to book Mallory, sight unseen, for the 2003 Jewish Music, Art & Food Festival at the Meyerson Symphony Center and filled the first two rows with supportive Dallas relatives. Happily, it all went well.

“You were terrific, thank God,” Mallory recalls Naxon telling her backstage after the show. “I told them you were terrific, but I didn’t know.”

Nine years later, Mallory, speaking by phone from her home in Malibu, Calif., says the days of being nervous are long behind her. She’ll be bringing Lamb Chop and her faithful sound and merchandise manager, her 13-year-old son James Abraham Tarcher Hood, along for the Dallas performance. Jamie, as she calls him, has been her right-hand man since he was 8, the one she’ll turn to for behind-the-scenes assistance as she presents a greatest-hits compilation of three of her Lamb Chop shows.

One of the highlights will be her mother’s “Deck Jingle,” in which Lamb Chop insists on singing “Jingle Bells” while she tries to perform “Deck the Halls.”

Another number she pulled from her Lamb Chop Loves America show is about the 44 presidents, which, to her relief, she didn't have to revise because President Barack Obama won.

“Politics aside, I voted for not having to rewrite the end of my song,” she says.

The star of the show remains her mother’s Lamb Chop, which has stayed uncannily the same in terms of the actual puppet (which Mallory carries in a Ziploc bag in her purse to keep her clean and safe), the voice and the unabashed honesty that is Lamb Chop’s trademark and enduring charm.

The biggest difference Mallory sees between her mother and herself is that her mother planned out each detail and stuck to it. In contrast, Mallory describes herself as a right-brain person.

“Sometimes I wonder if I even have a left brain,” she says.

She revels in the unexpected, particularly what pops out of Lamb Chop’s mouth.

“We once did a routine where she was in a full military outfit and I told her she’s impersonating an officer and she said, ‘Well, you’re impersonating Shari.’ It’s true and the truth is funny and the truth is touching. She says the things we all want to say. There’s no malice, there’s just the honesty of a child with the intelligence of an adult.”

The surprises keep coming, she says.

“I am not insane; I know she’s a puppet, but she speaks better Spanish than I do, she can hit an octave higher than I can. She’s totally, creatively free.”

She’s grateful to Lamb Chop because of the people she’s gotten to meet and the way it has kept her close with her mother’s spirit, she says.

“I loved Lamb Chop when I was a kid, but I didn’t realize that my whole life is special and my son’s life is special because of her.”

Lamb Chop has taken her all around the world, to military bases where she performs with the USO and now back to Dallas, where she’ll party again with Dallas relatives as her cousin Elya celebrates her 85th birthday this weekend.

“I feel like I have this great life where I am always on vacation and sometimes a show breaks out,” she says.

“I love love love what I do.”

