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## The Tiptoes of Happiness

By Laurie Snyder



Leslie Darwin O'Brien Photo provided

"When it all comes true

Just the way you planned

It's funny but the bells don't ring

It's a quiet thing."

- Fred Ebb and John Kander

Born and raised in Little Rock, Ark., longtime Lamorindan Leslie Darwin O'Brien began singing when she was just 6 years old. "Our house was filled with so much joy; we had hardwood floors so the music resonated through the house - all sorts of music. I grew up listening to my dad's incredibly beautiful voice as he stood beside me singing in church. My sisters and I also put on shows for our parents." By the time she was in ninth grade, she was touring nationally. "Music broadened my horizons."

She finished school before embarking on a 15-year career in the entertainment industry.

Supporting herself as a cater-waiter in between parts in Tony Kelly's "Faust" and other thought-provoking off-Broadway shows, she lived a life many others have lacked the courage to pursue.

But as much as she enjoyed that time, she says, she "was incredibly lucky that life took a different path." The Stanford grad found love with her

husband, Tim O'Brien, welcomed three boys to the world, and now serves as the Director of Community Life at the Orinda Community Church. This past April, she and her husband joined with other Lamorindans to raise a significant sum of money to benefit victims of the Boston Marathon bombing.

In the midst of it all, fate came knocking. A friend serendipitously suggested that Moraga resident, Terry Miller, would be a perfect music teacher for one of O'Brien's sons. As O'Brien became better acquainted with Miller, she learned that he just also happened to be an internationally renowned bassist who has performed with everyone from Amy Grant to Debbie Harry, the Doobie Brothers, Jimmy Buffett, Patsy Cline, Emmy Lou Harris, Stan Kenton, and Vince Gil.

In addition to a shared love of music, O'Brien and Miller have both founded successful youth education programs. Terry's Kids (tmkids.org) is Miller's nonprofit which is keeping music in San Francisco Bay Area schools while spearheading a music exchange program with Havana, Cuba this February. GirlPower is O'Brien's brainchild. (See "Orinda Community Church Aunties Up" in the Lamorinda Weekly's online archives.)

As their acquaintance grew into friendship, Miller began lobbying O'Brien to step out from the security of her church choir to return to solo performance. Her friends and fellow church members also nudged and prodded. "I could not have done this 30 years ago at all. I wouldn't have anything to bring to it," says O'Brien. "I also couldn't have done it without their support and the support of my wonderful family." Those who have already purchased the CD are calling O'Brien's sound soothing - something they pop in for their daily drive times and for lifetime in general. One friend even played the disc to ease the passing of a terminally ill relative.

Simply entitled, "Leslie," the compilation CD was released in October by San Rafael's Access

Music Records ([www.accessmusicrecords.com](http://www.accessmusicrecords.com)), and features a compelling mix of classics - "Moon River" and "Still Dream," the uplifting spiritual, "I'll Fly Away," and even an operatic duet, "Con Te Partiro." The CD is being sold locally by Orinda Books and Orinda Hardware with individual selections available on iTunes - just in time for the holidays. Up next, O'Brien and Miller will record songs of empowerment to help listeners be their very best selves, and will then release a Christmas CD in two years.

It's an ambitious schedule. The entire process for "Leslie" took about four-and-a-half years, including a six-month break for Miller to tour nationwide with the Zac Brown Band. "It was a steep learning curve combined with a lesson in humility, but the whole thing just worked out really well for this time in my life," explains O'Brien. "I was able to record during the many mornings it took, and then be with my kids when they came home from school. And I was healthy the whole time - probably because of all of the deep breathing I was doing."

Miller chose many of the songs to showcase O'Brien's unique, pure voice. "Terry has such amazing connections in the music industry. He wanted Tom Scott to play 'Autumn Leaves' and 'In the Wee Small Hours.'" A three-time Grammy Award-winning saxophonist, Scott has backed numerous jazz and popular singers over his long career, including Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Johnny Matthis.

O'Brien also weighed in, too, because she really wanted to share Kander and Ebb's, "A Quiet Thing" with the world. She loves the song's central message, and hopes it will resonate with listeners. "You think you know how your day will turn out, but then life happens. Things change. Then, one day, you look around and realize just how great your life is. Happiness really does come in on tiptoe."

To learn more and to purchase O'Brien's music, visit:

Leslie Darwin: <http://lesliesongs.com/>

iTunes: [https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/](https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/leslie/id946938908)

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