

Jazz vocalist Opie Bellas set to enthrall with her smoky tones

Impresario Serge Jeannet was so bowled over by Opie Bellas's voice he brought her to Cape Town. Opie chatted to **JANE MAYNE**.

VISITING singer Opie Bellas brings her smoky jazz tones to the Winchester Mansions' regular jazz platform, Harveys at the Mansions, on Sunday.

Where does she place herself in the vocal tradition?

"I'm told I have a unique interpretation. I'm steeped in traditional vocal music, but I'm influenced by

people who aren't traditional at all.

"I'm influenced even not by jazz singers but ethnic music, such as the fado of Dulce Pontes, although we don't sound anything alike. I'm not into copying anyone else, that defeats the purpose."

Bellas completed her music studies at Duquesne University in the US, later teaching jazz vocal master classes at Australia's Queensland Conservatory of Music. She is currently based in San Francisco.

She has four recordings to her

credit. The latest Latin jazz outing, *Faces*, features musicians such as pianist David Udolf.

Her *Live For Life* release was recorded with members of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Jazz Quartet, while her *Once Upon A Time* is a collaboration with guitarist and composer Joe Negri of Mister Rogers Neighbourhood.

One exciting snippet of news for Opie is that the *Faces* album has just been listed in the top releases in 2005 in the national Jazz Review.

Do any of her albums dig deeper than the others?

"They're all very representative. But certainly with the orchestral album, after having lost my brother, I realised I had better get busy and back to work.

"*So Live for Life* was born out of an extreme place in my life.

"*Faces* came about after having been introduced to Arthur Hamilton who wrote *Cry Me A River*."

While in Cape Town she'll be using Wayne Bosch on guitar, Basil

Moses on double bass, Maurice Gawronsky on drums and Andre Pieterse on piano.

Will she be working her way through the Real Book?

"It will be mixture. I like to blend music from French Films by Francis Lai. I also love to do music from the 30s which I'm partial to, and reminisce from the 60s. I won't be doing any originals on this trip."

Apart from her own compositions, she also considers herself an arranger.

"Since I've collaborated with Andre Pieterse it fits together because he's so talented. He's quite impressive as a pianist and these guys are young lions and it's a real pleasure."

● To book for the Winchester Mansions brunch at R145 per person, inclusive of a glass of bubbly on arrival and a complimentary newspaper, call 021 434 2351, or e-mail harveys@winchester.co.za.

Bellas's CDs are available at www.cdbaby.com