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## Grammy Award-winning artist brings her tour to Huntington

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Natalie Cole performs as part of the Marshall Artists Series at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 10, at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center.

Photo courtesy of the Marshall Artists Series

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By DAVE LAVENDER

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HUNTINGTON —Legendary R&B singer and multiple Grammy Award-winning artist Natalie Cole swings into Huntington as part of the Marshall Artists Series at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 10 at the historic Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center.

Come out and hear Cole, who has been making a splash in multiple genres since her 1975 debut that won her two Grammys. Cole, whose 1991 duet album with her dad Nat King Cole won her six Grammys, has a new album out, “Natalie Cole En Espanol,” that was released June 25 on Verve/Universal. In this, her first new studio album in five years, she revisits the rich repertoire of ageless Latin standards that once opened new vistas for her father. The 12 lushly orchestrated tracks, produced by Rudy Perez, Billboard’s Latin Music Producer Of The Decade, features Cole’s distinctive take on three classics from her father’s catalog, plus several other carefully chosen selections from the Latin American Songbook.

Here’s a Q&A with the world famous singer, who lives in Los Angeles and is currently on her world tour promoting “En Espanol.”

Lavender: First off, we’re really excited that you are coming to West Virginia. I mean it is West Virginia; we’re excited when anyone is coming to see us. (Cole laughs) Just kidding, you’ll love the 1928-built Keith-Albee one of the grand theaters of this country ... and the Marshall Artists Series is one of the oldest college-run artist’s series in the country, in biz since 1936 ... and they are fantastic to work with ...

First off, congratulations on the success of “En Espanol.” I just read where it’s been nominated for three Latin Grammys .... You’ve got to be breathing a sigh of relief and just really thankful for that kind of respect and love from the Latin community.



Cole: I was. I was just shocked when they announced the nominees, because I would think, it is a big step, it's like if something happened and we had a BET Award or an NAACP award go to a Caucasian person, so I mean it was just so outstanding and humbling that the Latin community has really embraced it. They really love it and I couldn't be more pleased."

Lavender: I know the record has been No. 1 as well in the Latin market... that's got to be a great feeling and particularly interesting since I read that neither your pops (Nat King Cole, who did three best-selling Latin albums) nor you are fluent Spanish speakers. It seems though that music crosses all boundaries. What is it about the Latin songs that you chose that really spoke to your heart?

Cole: I can tell you that it is definitely easier singing in Spanish than speaking it. It is a very fast speaking language. But the music, I have known about Latin music for years, and my first trip outside the U.S. was to Mexico City right after he had recorded his first Latin record, and the music is not unlike the American Songbook. The melodies are memorable and very engaging and singable and hummable and that kind of thing. The idea was to take this Latin Songbook and pick the most traditional, the most authentic and memorable songs and put them together to make a beautiful recording of this beautiful music. Doing this for the first time and trying this for the first time, I have to say it was the smartest thing my producers ever suggested doing. They wanted traditional Spanish music and steered me away from going with original songs or going over the top. The idea was to keep it real simple and in doing so make it a real tribute to the music, because this music is so beautiful and if you don't understand the language you can go on my web site and there is translations of the songs. They are like poetry. The lyrics are so beautiful and they are not rhymed ab-ab, they are like a whole story. The way they are written is very passionate and very sensual. It's just so, so interesting to go into this world."

Lavender: The album with Rudy Perez is just luscious ... You sound so natural in the language. Tell us about making that happen. I'm figuring that took a minute to get that kind of flow, so tell us about working with Rudy and finding your voice in this style of music.

Cole: I think the key for me as a singer is melody, that is what I really attach myself to when I hear the arrangement and how they are putting the song together I just flow. It is a gift. I can't tell you now what I was doing, but I just felt it, and I felt how the lyrics should go and where to emphasize a certain phrase, and Rudy was shocked. When we first were starting to discuss it he said, 'we'll get you a coach' but once I got to Miami and we started, he said 'I think you don't need a coach, you're hearing it and I will coach you.' And he did. He would kind of guide me and explain what a phrase meant or where to maybe put a little more into it. It was so much fun I can't tell you."



Lavender: It's one thing to pull that kind of sound off in the studio, but tell us about trying to recreate that kind of sound on the road. ... What kind of ensemble are you bringing with you?

Cole: We happened to have our piano player for this tour work with Arturo Sandoval (the legendary Latin trumpet player who actually just played the Artist Series a few years ago) and a lot of my musicians were so keen to do this kind of music that when they heard about the new Spanish record they started studying and thinking they might get kicked out of the club if they couldn't get it. The musicians we have are very diverse and they can play that Latin sound and also can play R&B and swing with jazz. These guys do it all. I am really blessed to have them, and they get it and love it and we're not bored."

Lavender: I know your father was truly 'Unforgettable' and you honor him and sing with him via video in your performances. What are some of the things that he taught you as a singer and a person that still stick in your mind and to your ribs today?

Cole: Well, I was one of his biggest fans. I would sit in the audience, and I wouldn't just be backstage. He was also very diverse and he was fearless. He didn't mind doing some trio stuff or Broadway, he did, of course, the beautiful arrangements with Nelson Riddle, but would attempt a little cool stuff. He came so far from where he first started out in the trio that sang 'Save the Boats for Mr. Jones' and 'Mona Lisa,' and kooky little songs like that. Then in between tributes to 'My Fair Lady' he would do in 1968 the Spanish thing and not only did he do that but he did two more Spanish albums. His manager, Carlos Castell was from the Dominican Republic and he persuaded my dad to do the record and it opened up a world for him and he wasn't afraid if it didn't work. He was courageous like that and I get a lot of that from him. It's really interesting that both of our careers have been so diverse and yet somehow it works. I know for me it keeps me fresh and interested musically and I think the audience knows that this is a diverse artist so we might be hearing R&B and pop and Spanish and they love it and it keeps them on the edge of their seats thinking what the hell is she going to do next."

Lavender: You've already chalked up some unforgettable performances on this "En Espanol" tour like to play the Hollywood Bowl. I see where it looks like you've got quite a tour for the rest of the year traveling throughout South America as well as Russia, Serbia and Eastern Europe. That's interesting that this tour has so many of those dates. Do you feel that speaks to the universal language of music?



Cole: “It is so crazy. We were in Warsaw and Vienna and Zurich and we did a concert in Italy and when we got to the new Spanish stuff they were singing it better and louder than I was. By the time we finished “Oye Como Va,” people were up on the chairs singing the songs, and a young girl came up to me after the show and said ‘I’m taking Spanish and I love this music.’ I think the Europeans really do love Italian music and French music and Latin music; they are hip to all of it. Sometimes I feel like America is behind in its thoughts but as artists we are supposed to explore and to experience and to help people see the world in different ways.”

## Welcome to the discussion.

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