

A Song for Wounded Hearts

Recording artist Kathy Troccoli is best known for her chart-topping hit singles. But in recent years her career has taken a twist, and she's finding that her greatest passion is ministering God's healing to wounded women.

For more than 75 years, the spotlights flooding the Elco Theater's elevated stage have gazed in admiration at thousands of performers from around the world. The classic vaudeville venue, nestled in the picturesque historic district of downtown Elkhart, Indiana, has showcased everything from unknown acrobats and comedians to silent films starring memorable icons such as Buster Keaton. Its ornate auditorium is still in use today, hosting the latest plays, musicals and secular rock bands.

But tonight, something is different. The 1,200 women gathered here for what is billed as "An Evening for Women With Kathy Troccoli" will not just be entertained by a performer in concert. They will be challenged to discover how the love of God can bring restoration and healing.

"Tonight is a night just for you," Troccoli announces once the applause subsides from her entrance on stage. "It's a time for renewal." Again, the audience cheers.

A spirited drumbeat builds to a crescendo, and the event—which could be described as half concert, half women's conference—is in full swing. Women clap and sway as Troccoli belts out "Parade," an energetic, contemporary-rock praise anthem from her latest album, *Love Has a Name (Reunion)*. The song, which boldly declares the authority of Jesus Christ, sets the tone for the rest of the evening and cultivates a sense of

camaraderie and freedom in the Spirit.

That sense builds as the night progresses. Between songs the award-winning singer shares vignettes from her personal life, speaking with absolute candor about the joys she has experienced, the pain she has endured and the ways in which God has healed her. Some of her stories are funny, others heartwarming, and a few elicit tears.

But Troccoli, born into a close-knit Italian family and raised on Long Island, New York, knows how to have fun, too. And the women who have broken away from the pressures of the daily grind to come tonight appreciate that.

They welcome the jokes she tells in her feisty New York accent. They roar when she reads her tongue-in-cheek list of the "Top 10 Reasons It's Great to Be Single." Troccoli's humor, at once disarming and infectious, fosters a lighthearted feeling of friendship that makes those present feel as if they are attending an intimate, home-group Bible study.

As the evening wanes, the songs become more introspective, the theater, more quiet. Troccoli sits on the edge of the dark stage under the soft glow of a single spotlight as she did in days past when she sang love songs in misty nightclubs. But the tender love song she sings tonight is about Jesus' love for the lost and hurting:

"I died for you/I'd do it all again if I had to/To show you what you really mean to Me...

"And that's how much I love you/That's how much I want you/I gave up My own life that you might live/That's how much I love

you/That's how much I want you to see/That you are My child/And you mean so much to Me."

A silence settles over the auditorium. No one is moving. Troccoli quietly addresses the crowd, and it feels as if she is speaking to each woman one-on-one.

"I understand the broken heart," she says. "But more than that, I understand the God who heals the broken. Tonight, if all you have the strength to do is drag yourself in front of the cross so that the blood of Jesus can spill on you and revive you a little bit, then do that."

Inviting anyone who needs prayer to come forward, Troccoli sings one more song. Without hesitation, more than 200 women flood the base of the platform and fall to their knees. Some are weeping, some are raising their hands, some are praying with friends. All of them are seeking a touch from God.

Suddenly, Troccoli lays down her microphone. The music continues to play, but she has stopped singing. She walks among the women, praying over them, sometimes pausing to give a warm hug or a tender word of encouragement.

After the ministry time ends, the singer returns to the platform to close the evening with an upbeat, danceable tune, followed by a hearty wish goodnight. When the women exit the theater, they appear to be truly refreshed. It certainly has not been a typical concert—not even by Christian standards.

Charisma met with Kathy Troccoli during a recent conference to find out why one of the biggest names in Christian music would break out of the traditional recording-artist mold to pursue

women's ministry. With a characteristic vulnerability that has become just as much a trademark as the smooth vocals on her albums, the 42-year-old recording artist shared openly about her vision for reaching the women of this generation, her walk with God and the power of the Holy Spirit to heal and restore.

A Heart for Women

It was the mid-1970s when a 16-year-old teen with stars in her eyes lied about her age so she could sing in exclusive nightclubs throughout New York. Little did Kathleen Colleen Troccoli know that one day she would have 12 albums, 23 Dove Award nominations, two Grammy nominations and two Dove Awards under her belt and that she would garner five Top 10 mainstream radio hits and 15 No. 1 Christian radio hits—to name just a few of the honors she's received.

Neither did she know that one of her hit singles, "A Different Road," would become symbolic of the fact that her career would take her down a very different road than most singers—leading not only to large concert venues, but also to a significant ministry to women. Troccoli has participated in 75 women's conferences in the last three years and has more than 30 scheduled for 2001. She is a mainstay at such well-known events as the Women of Faith, Time Out for Women and Heritage Keepers conferences.

The overwhelming response to her message is what birthed the idea to start her own conferences in smaller venues, allowing for more of an up-close-and-personal feel and hands-on, charismatic-style ministry time. Troccoli hopes to do 15 of these events this year.

“I see such a need for this,” she says. “I think that with a lot of women, there’s that broken little

girl inside. But I think veils are taken away when women are together. And when you have Jesus in the midst of that, and when His Spirit is there and His truth is being spoken, you’re getting right to the heart of the matter. I would love every woman to get set free in new ways and to fall more deeply in love with Jesus.”

It’s that love that compels the singer to press beyond the song and to venture out in ministry. Although her music always has been and always will be an integral part of who Troccoli is, she feels that the Holy Spirit has laid a burden on her heart for wounded women and that He is calling her to step out to declare His healing. And even though speaking is a relatively new thing for her—her first keynote speaking engagement was last September—she believes she has found her niche.

“I have never felt this comfortable,” she says. “When I first got into Christian music, I hardly even said a word on stage. Who would have thought the most content I would ever feel would be speaking! Being with these women totally ignites me.”

But it also represents what Troccoli sees as an awesome responsibility: speaking God’s truth into people’s lives. She compares ministry to dealing with the ark of the covenant, in that it is something to be approached with reverent awe.

“When you’re dealing that closely with people; when you are asking them to be honest and lay their burdens down at the foot of the cross; it’s different than singing a nice little song and then saying, ‘God bless you, goodnight,’” she says.

“It’s a world of difference. I don’t feel like I have it all together; I struggle like the rest. But there’s the fear in my heart of, ‘Troccoli, you’d better be in private who you are in public.’ I absolutely have that fear in my heart because it’s not me; it’s the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Troccoli’s transparency and reliance on God’s power are the reasons so many people are responding to her message—flooding the platform in droves for prayer after her concerts and conferences.

“There’s no put-on, no plastic front,” says best-selling author Barbara Johnson, one of the favorite keynote speakers at Women of Faith events. “She’s honest. That’s why women respond to her.”

But Johnson believes there is another reason, too.

“Her life is full of brokenness,” she says. “Because she’s been through things, she’s able to minister effectively to broken areas in other people’s lives.”

The Breaking Process

Troccoli learned about brokenness at an early age. Her father, who was a foreman in a New York printing company, died of colon cancer when she was 15. But though his absence during a crucial point in her adolescence left its mark, resulting in what she says has been an emptiness for a father in her life, she was surrounded by a loving mother, sister and extended Italian family, all of whom provided strong support.

Troccoli was raised in the Roman Catholic Church but did not enter into a personal relationship with Christ until she was 20. A friend she worked with at a summertime job challenged her to consider the truth that Jesus is Lord whether Troccoli accepted Him as such or not. During a break at work one day, the friend encouraged the aspiring singer to read the Gospel of John. Troccoli went home and read through it that night.

"I got to the end of the book and was overwhelmed," she remembers. "I was amazed at the life of Christ. I said, 'Yes, Lord, come be my Lord and Savior.'" But her hunger for God didn't stop there.

"I just started pressing into the life of Christ," she says, "and praying: 'God, I'll take whatever it is You have for me. And if that means You want me to speak in tongues—and I like to say "tongues of fire" because I love what that means—or if You want me to lay hands on the sick, then bring it

on.'"

And bring it on He did. Two months later Troccoli, who had just been filled with the Holy Spirit and had started singing in different churches throughout New York, had finished singing two songs in a small Long Island church when a man stood up to say something. The young singer didn't know a thing about the spiritual gift of prophecy.

"I'll never forget it," she told Charisma. "He said: 'Thus saith the Lord: "Just as David sang his songs, so you will sing to the world, and people will be healed."' So when I see what's happening in the women's movement now—or in those times when I see someone in the audience, and I put the microphone down and go pray over them—I'm thinking, This was all spoken

to me in 1978!”

Getting saved and filled with the Spirit didn't mean that the road ahead would be easy, however. Although her 1982 release, *Stubborn Love (Reunion)*, became the fastest-selling debut album by a female Christian artist, that achievement—and the success of subsequent releases—were tempered by a string of hardships.

Troccoli had to take a hiatus from her music career from 1986 to 1991 to get counseling, overcome a 10-year battle with bulimia, recover from a devastating bankruptcy following a bad management experience and to spend time with her mother, who had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Just weeks before the release of the singer's 1991 comeback album, *Pure Attraction (Reunion/Geffen)*, her mother succumbed to the disease. But even in the face of death, Troccoli witnessed the presence of God.

“The day my mother was dying, I read Psalm 23 to her,” she recalls. “She squeezed out every word with me, over her dying breath.”

Then the singer, who had sung for audiences of thousands, sang for her mother: “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, there's just something about that name.” Suddenly, a patient named Priscilla in the neighboring bed broke out in quiet praises: “Bless You, God; Praise You, Jesus; Glory to You, Lord.”

Choking back a tear, Troccoli remembers that holy moment.

“What's so sweet about my Jesus is that He had put this precious woman in my mother's room, the person He wanted there

while she was dying. And she was singing His praises as God was calling my mother home.”

Troccoli calls those tender moments “kisses from the King.”

“It’s those times when we know that God’s saying—sometimes gently, sometimes screaming from the mountaintop—‘I love you!’

“Sometimes you want to see the Red Sea part and the manna fall from heaven, but if we would just observe the mundane, we would see Him. We pass those moments up because we’re waiting for the ‘fire by night’ and the ‘cloud by day.’ But most of the time He wants to be an extraordinary God in the ordinary. I’ve learned to see Him more in that.”

Finding Freedom

Those everyday moments are not the only times in which Troccoli has learned to find God, however. In fact, she says that she has found Christ more precious in the difficult seasons in her life. And the pain she has experienced is what God has used to shape her for ministry.

“Pain has worked a desperateness for God I don’t think I would have had otherwise,” she candidly shares. “And it has let me see God’s face and heart in ways I couldn’t have otherwise known. It has made me more sober to the things of life.

“I have become more compassionate,” she continues. “It makes

me really look at people, and has caused me to have more mercy in

my heart. And it's made me want to be about the things of the kingdom of God more than ever before."

Being about her Father's business has led Troccoli to become involved in things she never would have dreamed of when she was a struggling nightclub entertainer on Long Island. She frequently participates in events for Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship Ministries; she has supported His Touch Ministries, a Houston-based AIDS organization; she is an advisory board member of Life Teen, a cutting-edge, Catholic youth ministry; and she founded A Baby's Prayer Foundation, a ministry that raises money and creates resources for pro-life organizations (see story on page 49).

The singer is also a writer. Her new book with co-author Dee Brestin, *Falling in Love With Jesus* (Word), was released in January and was written with the intent, Troccoli says, of helping women find an intimacy with Christ that will ignite their souls. It is simply another way of helping women find new freedom.

Troccoli encourages women not to settle for partial deliverance as they face the painful issues in their lives but to receive everything God has for them. She uses the analogy of Lazarus taking off his graveclothes after Jesus raised him from the dead.

"Sometimes we release one arm, and we think, I'm free!" she says. "And then a year later the right leg's released, and we think, Now I'm really free! But you're not really free. My goal is to get women to be honest with themselves and with God

so they can really unwrap the graveclothes and live—obtaining the abundant life of the soul Jesus talks about—so they can give abundant life out to everyone around them.”

And it’s watching women find that abundant life that excites Troccoli more than anything else. She tells the story of a woman who came up to her after hearing her share the Lazarus analogy at a concert.

“She knelt down and whispered in my ear,” the singer remembers. “I could barely hear her. She said, ‘Kathy, I unwrapped my pinky tonight!’ I just hugged her and cried and said, ‘God bless you, it’s a start.’ And that’s what it’s all about. I want to see women become all God has intended them to be.

“How could I compare that with just singing a nice little love song?” *

Bill Shepson is associate editor of Charisma magazine and managing editor of Ministries Today magazine.

On the Road to Healing

Kathy Troccoli talks about the needs of women today and how to find healing and deliverance.

When Kathy Troccoli looks out at the thousands of women gathered at a conference to hear her speak, she endeavors to communicate how the love of Christ can meet their needs and set them free from whatever might be holding them back. And

sometimes, the best way she can describe that love is to share a vision she says God gave her in the late 1980s.

Troccoli was deep in worship during a praise service at a small church she attended on Long Island when suddenly, she says, she felt as if she was in the arms of Jesus.

"I get this vision where I'm in His arms and we're waltzing," she told *Charisma*. "I wasn't sure what it meant, but I just basked in it and thought, *I'm just going to celebrate this time with Jesus.*"

Three weeks later the singer attended a retreat, and at one point she went up to the altar for prayer. The guest speaker started praying over Troccoli, then suddenly stopped in mid-sentence. She told Troccoli that she saw a vision of Jesus waltzing with her in a ballroom—the exact vision the young singer had three weeks prior. She then interpreted the vision, explaining that Jesus was waltzing Troccoli around the "principalities and powers" that were surrounding the perimeter of the ballroom, and He was saying to them, "This is My trophy."

"I've never forgotten that," Troccoli shares. "I tell women, 'You are His trophy; don't believe anything less than that.' We don't fight against flesh and blood. Whether you're single, in a good marriage or in a failing marriage, you are His beloved, and He will waltz you through life, around the principalities and powers saying, 'This is My trophy.'"

It's a message that seems to be striking a chord with women across the country. Every time Troccoli gives an altar call for women to receive prayer,

hundreds—sometimes
thousands—of people flood
the platform. Observers say it
is because she is in touch with people's struggles and
needs—especially those of women.

Troccoli says that some of the needs she notices most often in women are low self-esteem, a longing to feel safe and to be known, loneliness—even in marriage—and different types of weight issues. Her own experiences of overcoming a 10-year battle with bulimia and dealing with the deaths of her father and mother have given her a unique platform for showing others the pathway to healing for their own lives. The singer clearly outlines several steps a person can take to start the healing process.

“First, you can't start with true healing unless you absolutely have allowed the Lord free reign of your heart,” she says. “You need the penetration of the Holy Spirit.

“Second, I believe we're as sick as our secrets. Sometimes we live in partial freedom because we're afraid to be honest with ourselves and the people around us. And there's going to be an element of dying [to the flesh]. Frankly, most of us don't want to. So we'd rather have dark places in our hearts that only allow us to go through life on half throttle, when God wants so much more for us.”

Troccoli says the third key step to finding freedom is not to be afraid to get help.

“The Bible says to seek peace and pursue it,” she continues. “I got counseling. You have to seek after good counsel, after

good people of God who have His wisdom and can help pull you out of the muck and the mire.”

The main thing is to remember that we never struggle alone.

“When I met the Lord, it wasn’t like Jesus came into my life and the next day I was skinny,” she candidly shares. “It was a process. But I knew I wasn’t alone on the journey; there was Someone who was going to lead me through all of this.” *

A Baby’s Prayer

One of Kathy Troccoli’s songs about abortion has been used to heal women’s hearts.

It was the early 1980s when Kathy Troccoli decided that she needed to take a course at a local crisis pregnancy center (CPC). She wanted to find out more about abortion and its effects so she could help the many women who came up to her after concerts to talk about it. She wasn’t prepared for what she was about to discover.

The singer learned that more than 38 million abortions have taken place in the United States since 1973, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute. Other statistics revealed that 4,400 abortions occur each day in this country. Even worse, she read that it is estimated that 43 percent of women will have at least one abortion by the age of 45.

Troccoli says she left the classes shocked—but also grieved by the scars abortion leaves on post-abortive women.

Two years later, Troccoli was at a pro-life event and saw a bumper sticker that read, “If I should die before I wake...” Her thoughts finished the prayer:

I pray her soul you'll keep. Although it would be several years before she would write the rest of the lyrics, she says that was the birth of "A Baby's Prayer." The song won a 1998 Dove Award for Inspirational Recorded Song of the Year.

But winning an award was not Troccoli's purpose in writing the song. "I have seen the emotional, psychological and spiritual turmoil surrounding this decision," she says. "I wrote 'A Baby's Prayer' to show the forgiveness, love and mercy available for all those who are suffering from the consequences of this choice, as well as those who are preparing to choose."

Two years ago, 18-year-old Leah (who asked that her last name not be used), was one of those preparing to choose. She was a 16-year-old pastor's daughter who had become pregnant by an abusive boyfriend. Struggling with shame and fear, she made an appointment at an abortion clinic.

When she was sitting in the operating room, however, a nurse tuned the radio to a Christian station—which just happened to be playing "A Baby's Prayer." The song grabbed Leah's heart.

"Before I knew it, I was in tears," Leah recalls. "I realized God would forgive me and help me through." She got dressed, walked out of the clinic and went home to tell her parents everything. Today she lives with her 2-year-old daughter, Libby, attends church regularly and shares her testimony in schools.

Leah's experience isn't uncommon. Troccoli has heard similar stories many times. When she talks about abortion at her concerts, hundreds of women typically come up for prayer.

This overwhelming response is why Troccoli founded A Baby's Prayer Foundation (BPF) in October 1997. BPF provides financial help and practical resources for life-affirming organizations and develops projects to equip them for educating, supporting and bringing healing to hurting women. Past projects have included helping America's Crisis Pregnancy Helpline expand their number of counselors and hours of operation, and distributing 10,000 "A Baby's Prayer" videos to more than 8,500 organizations—including one to each member of the U.S. Congress, at the request of Republican senator Orrin Hatch of Utah.

BPF's latest undertaking, set to be completed this summer, is a video-book project on adoption. The video will be sent free of charge to CPCs across the United States and is designed to be shown to expectant teen mothers to help them realize that adoption is a beneficial choice. The book is for CPC directors and counselors and will include extensive information on attorneys and agencies that help with adoptions in their particular locale.

"It's amazing that we're fighting the huge abortion industry with nonprofit CPCs," says BPF's executive director, Donna Gardner. "But we have Jesus, and we're making headway. That's what encourages me." *

For more information, write

A Baby's Prayer Foundation, P.O. Box 1458, Jupiter, Florida,
33468-1458; or call
(888) 673-4BPF or log on
to .

A Baby's Prayer

A

Baby's

Prayer

One of Kathy Troccoli's songs about abortion has been used to
heal women's hearts.

A Baby's Prayer

I can hear her talking with a friend

I think it's all about me

Oh how she can't have a baby now

My mommy doesn't see

That I feel her breathe

I know her voice

Her blood, it flows through my heart

God You know my greatest wish is

that We'd never be apart

But if I should die before I wake

I pray her soul You'll keep

Forgive her, Lord, she doesn't know

That You gave life to me

Do I really have to say goodbye

Don't want this time to be through

Oh please tell her that I love her, Lord

And that You love her, too

'Cause if I should die before I wake

I pray her soul You'll keep

Forgive her, Lord, she doesn't know

That You gave life to me

On the days when she may think of
me Please comfort her with the truth
That the angels hold me safe and
sound 'Cause I'm in heaven with You
I'm in heaven with You

Words by Kathy Troccoli and music

by Scott Brasher

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