

Karrin Allyson: Sassy, Sexy, and Magnificent @ Jazz Alley

Contributed by Joe Montague
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“Breathtaking” might be a word one could use to describe Karrin Allyson’s performance at Dimitriou’s Jazz Alley in Seattle Washington on Saturday September 22nd. You could just as easily use the adjectives “sassy, sexy and magnificent” to characterize her show. Wearing a persimmon-colored dress with black trim, Allyson, backed by a seasoned group of musicians (bassist Jeff Johnson, drummer Todd Strait, vibist Steve Nelson and electric guitarist Rod Fleeman) moved easily between ballads, standards, bop and swing tunes.

The evening opened with the band taking to the stage in the candlelit venue, minus Allyson. Their instrumental “Fried Pies” exceeded ten minutes in length. Despite an amped-up crowd anticipating Allyson’s arrival on stage, nobody was complaining about the set beginning without her, as they soaked up Nelson’s elegant touch on the mallets matched by Fleeman’s nimble fingers across the frets of his guitar. Johnson gently laid down a strong foundation for his fellow musicians to build upon.

Allyson then opened with the Richard Rodgers / Oscar Hammerstein II standard, “It Might As Well Be Spring,” from the film *State Fair*. As she moved about the stage, Allyson slipped into a groove that made it difficult to tell where the music ended and Karrin Allyson began. She sings effortlessly while taking time to enjoy the work of the musicians accompanying her. Several times during her performance, Allyson acknowledged the efforts of her musicians, including the incomparable Rod Fleeman, who has been at her side for the past seventeen years. Drummer Todd Strait has also been with Allyson since the early days of her career. The instrumentalists’ playing was not lost on a knowledgeable jazz crowd either, as each solo was followed by a vigorous applause from the audience.

Karrin Allyson: Sassy, Sexy, and Magnificent (Continued):



You could have heard the proverbial pin drop during her singing of “Stay,” one of the most memorable and beautiful presentations of a song that I have ever heard. As though Portuguese is not her first language, she alternated effortlessly between singing in this romantic language and English. She worked with renowned composer Paul Williams to adapt the Brazilian rhythm, and the song will appear on a new CD with a planned release date in February. For those in the under-forty generations who may not be as familiar with Paul Williams’ work, those retro tunes you enjoy, such as “Just An Old Fashioned Love Song,” (Three Dog Night) and many of the Carpenters’ tunes, like “We’ve Only Just Begun,” owe their existence to him.

Allyson also reached into the songbook of Antonio Carlos Jobim to deliver beautiful readings of the bossa nova, “Desafinado,” and “Double Rainbow,” the latter performed with her seated at the piano keys. If it were customary at a jazz event to toss roses to the performer, there is no doubt that the stage on which Allyson performed would have been covered with the flowers.

She said she was dedicating her sassy “Sweet Home Cookin’ Man” (Sweet Home Cookin’ – 1994) to her “Uncle Dave,” who lives in Seattle, then added “but he is not anything like the men described in the tune.” She was scintillating in her delivery of the line, “My taste buds are in a frenzy darlin’, they think they have found paradise.” Her fans were clapping and singing along to the words of this head-nodding, toe-tapping delight.

Other highlights by this captivating vocalist included the somber and introspective “Everything Must Change” (Daydream – 1997), Cannonball Adderly’s “Never Say Yes” (Footprints, 2006) and the swinging tune “Moanin,” from her 2002 CD, In Blue. “Moanin” featured a great call-and-response between Fleeman’s guitar and Nelson’s vibes, as the two men gave their instruments almost humanlike voices.

Karrin Allyson sold out both shows in the expansive Jazz Alley and, after taking in her marvelous performance, it is easy to see why.