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Jeanne O'Connor

STRING OF PEARLS Stockade Inn Schenectady, NY October 18, 2009

by Tom Pierce

An observer of the Swingtime Jazz Society's Sunday afternoon concert by the smoothly talented Jazz vocal group String of Pearls might initially be tempted to term it a pleasing *stroll* down memory lane, given the wealth of vintage material popularized initially by legendary Swing era artists. But in reflecting on the high percentage of effervescent medium and uptempo tunes in the joyful 24-song, two set outing, a better description would be a "*jaunt*" or "*spin*" down memory lane.



Tony Regusis

Vocalists Sue Halloran, Jeanne O'Connor and Holli Ross have performed together at a wide variety of sophisticated venues nationally and abroad, in the more than 15 years they've been together. Only New York area pianist Tony Regusis in their trio had performed with them previously. Capitol District stalwarts, bassist Pete Toigo and drummer Pete Sweeney quickly acclimated themselves to the group's charts to provide a solid rhythmic base, with effective accents to complement the vocals.

I had last seen String of Pearls live in 2001 at Birdland in New York. And it was soon obvious that their repertoire had increased in the 8 years since, as less than half of the songs performed were from their three CD's I was familiar with. Despite their concentration on retro material, they kept the program varied and interesting, by exploring a wide range of material. Favorites from the 30's - 50's included the Andrews Sisters' huge World War II hit "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy", the Chordettes' beguiling "Mr Sandman", Glenn Miller's "String of Pearls" and a Sinatra medley - "Come Dance With me", "All the Way" and "the Coffee Song" - that they had performed in tribute to him at the Cabaret Convention in Manhattan. Several of the tunes - "Sukiyaki", "String of Pearls" and "South American Way" - also featured Latin aspects in the arrangements.

And certainly hard core Jazz fans appreciated numbers like "Professor Bop", written by the renowned cult figure Babs Gonzalez, Horace Silver's "Doodling" with words by the unsurpassed Jazz lyricist Jon Hendricks, whose work on Count Basie material ("It's Sand Man", and "Corner Pocket") was also presented. It was clear, as they frequently acknowledged in references to ground breaking groups like the Mills Brothers, Boswell and Andrews' Sisters, as well as Hendricks' own Lambert, Hendricks and Ross, that String of Pearls was inspired by, and indebted to these seminal groups. They smoothly incorporated the jazz elements of scatting and vocalese these artists pioneered into many of the lead and harmony parts.

Throughout the concert, the group was exceedingly professional, not only in their singing, but also in their tasteful, amiable and witty stage presence.



Susan Halloran

These qualities, plus their well-informed maturity and talent, easily prevented this nostalgic performance from ever becoming campy, silly or anything less than their own fresh, respectful nod to the aforementioned seminal vocal groups and many other excellent passed musicians cited. The packed house of over 90 attendees demonstrated their pleasure with the high level of entertainment received. For more information on the presenting organization, access www.swingtimejazz.org

Tom Pierce has had a burning passion for Jazz for over 45 years, initiated and fueled by seeing live in New York City, starting in the early 1960's, virtually every major artist still performing. He's been very happily living in Guilderland the last 8 years, as an active retiree sharing his love of music by writing online reviews for a number of web sites, preparing DVD presentations to various groups, co-Hosting Radio programs showcasing his favorite artists and busily supporting A Place for Jazz and the SwingTime Society in a variety of ways.



Holli Ross

photos by Andrzej Pilarczyk

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