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Take Me Back to Manhattan

Betsyann Faiella | September 19, 2022 | 0 Comments

Take Me Back to Manhattan

Chelsea Table + Stage, NYC, September 3, 2022

Reviewed by Bart Greenberg



A joyful evening of jazz and comedy was presented at Chelsea Table + Stage, by a hot band, four individual singers of different styles and personalities, and a comic host who was truly funny. These programs often fall apart because the various parts don't gel into a satisfying whole; happily, that was not the case here. The very funny Ophira Eisenberg of NPR and the very charming bandleader Konrad Paszkudzki created a thrilling program all about New York City in all its colorful and upbeat aspects. The fact that she is an immigrant from Canada and he is one from Australia added to the sense of the melting pot that is NYC.

Eisenberg managed to be both warm and acerbic, an impressive balancing act, as she shared stories of her adjustment to life in the Big Apple, both before and through the pandemic. As a wife and mother, with both her and her spouse working from home in a very small Brooklyn apartment, her tales of adjustment and resilience were especially relatable (including a tale of an artisanal ice cream shop that took the fun out of ice cream). Most importantly, her tales felt not like an intrusion into the musical program but more a commentary on the songs celebrating the city.

Paszkudzki led the sizzling band that consisted of himself on piano, Jay Sawyer on drums, Dylan Shamat on bass, and Sam Raderman on guitar. Thee showed their musical expertise (born from their impressive individual careers in jazz), and they also demonstrated impressive flexibility as they adjusted to each of the vocalists of the evening: Olivia Chindamo, Kyle Taylor Parker, Anais Reno, and Vanisha Gould. Each one was so polished and exciting that it would be a pleasure to spend an entire evening with them. The band also got to happily show off with an instrumental version of "Theme from *New York, New York*," which was exhilarating, especially for its thrilling drum solo.

Chindamo kicked off the vocal part of the evening with a swinging version of "Sunday in New York Sunday." The singer possesses the sort of confidence that allows the audience to relax and simply enjoy. Proving her versatility, she followed up with the classic "Manhattan," taken at a slower pace than usual as she seemed to be strolling through the celebrated city, and a pure jazz take on "The Lady Is a Tramp," with a trace of Ella Fitzgerald in her scatting.

Next up was Parker, who has returned to New York from the national tour of *Pretty Woman*. He showed both a high clear tenor and a sense of joy as he sang "Drop Me Off in Harlem" and "Lulu's Back in Town"; that one had a terrific guitar solo by Raderman. Following him was the charming Reno, who has been dazzling audiences around town as a teen with her surprisingly mature voice. Now, barely an adult legally, her talent is growing stronger and stronger, and she shows an understanding of lyrics still far beyond her years. Her intrinsic jazz phrasing on "Lullaby of Birdland" was stunning, and she followed that up with a slyly humorous delivery of the classic "How About You?"

To round out the show, the dynamic Gould claimed the stage. In her multi-colored outfit, she seemed to radiate light as she burst through a rendition of "Broadway, Broadway," scatting and teasing the drummer, much to the joy of us all. Her following number, "Autumn in New York," was so smooth so mellow, so—well, perfect. She wrapped up the show with its title tune, complete with an impressive bass solo by "Fingers" Shamat, for a bouncy ending to this marvelous evening.

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