



Cabaret Exchange

“Raising the Bar on All Things Cabaret”

And on TUESDAYS...

By Rob Lester

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Good news! Big news! Big band news! Strike-up-the-band-worthy big big band news! The Iridium, the classy jazz room on Broadway at 51st Street has started a new weekly series featuring big bands with vocalists. Every Tuesday expect exciting and jazzy music accessible to the jazz-timid. It's being booked by Scott Barbarino, Vice Prez of MAC and Publisher of this very website, and a jazzaret-loving man of music. He's a busy bee these days, what with MAC's activities, this series, and his own return to performing with his vocal group the Bev-Naps who had two dates at The Metropolitan Room this summer (I enjoyed both nights myself, but found the second far tighter and smarter with the emphasis where it belongs: on the music and fabulous harmonizing). He invited me to an early Big Band Night, a test run so to speak, and boy, was I glad I went.

Expecting to stay for one set and then to run off to something else, I had such a good time that I stayed for the late set, too. The appreciative crowds at both time slots seemed to agree with me in their cheering reactions and close attention. Though some clubs of this kind are known NOT to have rapt audiences and there's some chatter, this crowd (with the exception of one table in the back) was quiet and very focused on the show. The band was trumpet player Alex Nguyen's Jazz Conceptions Orchestra. He's a new name to me, and a happy discovery. They opened their first set with the Ellington theme, "Take the A Train" and it was immediately clear that we were in for a great night with real pros and an exciting sound with plenty of focused energy and good vibes all around. Compositions by other big jazz names were on the bill, too: Miles Davis, Fats Navarro, Todd Dameron, Ben Webster. Chick Corea's "Hand-Me Down" showed a wide range of talents and flavors, starting with a sensitive and reflective mood in a gentle opening to a wild all-stops-out counterpointing blasts at the end that could raise the roof. But it wasn't all the expected jazz suspects: even the Beatles made an appearance with "Come Together" which made the audience do exactly that as they swayed and clapped along, really digging it. It was especially notable to see the bandleader enjoying himself so much, appreciating his players' work-- something not always prevalent in world of ultra-cool laidback jazz cats. I especially liked their playing on "Ballad of the Sad Young Men," a number that always gets to me, and an impressive "Flamenco Sketches" by Miles Davis. This group is perhaps as tasty as the food at The Iridium—and that's a compliment.

An extra added attraction was the presence of two vocalists, although I wish they'd been given more to do. Angela Roberts set a nice romantic mood with a relaxed "The Shadow Of Your Smile," though it would be better if she didn't close her eyes so often and reached out to the crowd more. Nevertheless, she had an attractively dreamy quality to her voice, floating along with real vulnerability and velvety vocals. Fireworks were created by singer Amanda Brasher, a burst of pizzazz with her high-octane talent. Her number, the Harold Arlen/ Johnny Mercer classic "Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate The Positive" was a big hit. With playful phrasing and a twinkle in her eye, she shimmered and wailed, knocking the number out of the ballpark, her positive energy really right for the message of the song. It will be the lucky singer who gets to sing with this big band and the others booked into the club. I love a piano as much as Irving Berlin, and the Just A Piano series mentioned in my last article on Mondays is great to be reminded that all a good singer needs is one player, but nothing can compare with the real fireworks and interplay of a hot big band. Make Tuesday your day to give the band a hand.

Alex Nguyen And The Jazz Conceptions Orchestra with featured vocalist Amanda Brasher can be seen Tuesday October 21st at 8:30 & 10:30 at IRIDIUM Jazz Club. \$10 off for all MAC, Cabaret Scenes, Cabaret Hotline & Cabaret Exchange members.

For More Information Go To www.iridiumjazzclub.com