



Alex Nguyen's Jazz Conceptions Orchestra Meets Annie Sellick ■ Posted: 2008-02-14

By Steve Blickstein

Here's a music tip you can take to the bank. If you ever have an opportunity to grab a performance by Alex Nguyen's Jazz Conceptions Orchestra, go, even if it means canceling a dinner date with 'er Majesty, Queen Elizabeth or a spin around Daytona Speedway with Dale Junior. And if Annie Sellick, an incomparable jazz vocalist from Nashville, is on the card, give up your first-born for a ticket.

Nguyen's Jazz Conceptions Orchestra and the estimable Ms. Sellick heated up a chilly Friday night in Palm Coast, FL with a special concert at the Trinity Presbyterian Church. Sitting in with the orchestra during this gig was Brandon Lee, a trumpet player from Wynton Marsalis' Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra.

When the show opened with Billy Strayhorn's "Take the A Train," the two hundred or so jazz fans in the church sanctuary knew their prayers were answered; it was going to be a swinging, rocking night. Alex Lore's alto sax solo drove the piece hard. The band paid homage to the church setting, settling down into the traditional "Let Us Break Bread Together," featuring a moving Nguyen solo, and then sliding into a rousing "This Little Light of Mine." And then the program lifted off in earnest as this slim girl with a huge voice sashayed down the center aisle belting out the tune and taking the audience with her. By the next tune, Harold Arlen's "As Long as I Live," everyone there knew that Annie Sellick had arrived on the scene and would not be leaving soon. Sellick and the Nguyen's Jazz Conceptions Orchestra were synergy (not to mention energy) personified. Next came Fred Rausch's "Answer Me" followed by Cole Porter's "I Love Paris," which featured Ryan Weisheit on baritone sax. Sellick then morphed into Rosemary Clooney, knocking the audience out with "Mambo Italiano."

The band went back to the BeBop era, opening the second set with "Tadd's Delight." Sellick's voice was a perfect complement to the band's versatile and intricate arrangements bringing jazz standards into the 21st Century with guts and finesse. It was hard to believe that this was the first gig they'd shared. Sellick's rendition of Lionel Bart's "Where is Love?" arranged by Nguyen was as heartfelt as when Georgia Brown sang it in "Oliver," an enduring Broadway hit. And, if that didn't bring tears to the audience's eyes, when Alex and Annie paid tribute to the Brothers Gershwin with their moving duet on "But Not for Me," the interplay between the two young luminaries was pure magic. The eloquently romantic mood continued with the delicate ballad, Chelsea Bridge. The arrangement tipped a respectful hat to Strayhorn's interesting harmonic concept while Annie's haunting interpretation of the melody gave the tune an intriguing edge. The spirit of Johnny Mercer joined in to kick the energy back up with a memorable rendition of what should be Sellick's signature tune, "Accentuate the Positive." And, as the song says, it was clear that Alex Nguyen's Jazz

Conceptions Orchestra and Annie Sellick did not mess with "Mr. In-between." At the end of the performance, the appreciative audience was ready to take the A-Train to Kokopelli's Night Club in Savannah, GA where Alex Nguyen's Jazz Conceptions Orchestra, with their new best friend the incredible Annie Sellick would be performing the next evening.

Alex Nguyen, trumpet; Brandon Lee, trumpet; Will Neal, trombone; Alex Lore, alto sax; Jeremy Fratti, tenor sax; Ryan Weisheit, baritone sax; Joshua Bowlus, piano; Paul Sikivie, bass; Ben Adkins, drums; Annie Sellick, vocals.