

Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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Community Sings to Soldiers ? Review

Written by David on December, 14 2009

Twice this weekend, the glaring spotlight of Indianapolis media shone down upon the city of Shelbyville, and each evening the focus was a poignant reminder of a community reaching out to support its soldiers overseas.

On consecutive nights (Friday and Saturday) family, friends and music lovers gathered at the Strand Theatre to enjoy a Christmas musical and thank, talk with and send holiday greetings to local members of the 38th Combat Aviation Brigade serving in Iraq.

An especially moving moment came as Saturday night's moderator Cindy Houpt and the crowd sang a heartfelt rendition of "Wishing you a Merry Christmas," to the local soldiers gathered in a desert across the globe.

"I felt blessed to play a part in connecting out hometown soldiers with a little bit of home," said Houpt, a local, featured singer during the weekend's Christmas Cabaret at the Strand.

This impromptu serenade was a decision made on stage during the live feed, she said. "I thought it would feel good for them to hear hometown voices sing to them."

The 140 members of the 38th Combat Aviation Brigade began their year-long deployment in August as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The unit is based out of the Shelbyville National Guard Armory and provides air-to-ground support such as med-vac flights and battlefield circulation, among other operations.

"I would like to thank all Hoosiers for their support, especially the people back home," Staff Sgt. Jeff Lowery said, during Saturday's live internet feed from the darkened, pre-dawn desert of Iraq to the Strand's movie screen.

On this night, the magic moment of the evening arrived locally at 9:30 as six soldiers sitting in a military base half-way across the world were about to begin another day in a combat zone, a long way from home.

The internet connection to the battlefield was provided by Comcast and enabled local soldiers like Spc. Scott Wells, to talk in real-time with family members sitting in the theatre.

"My most rewarding experience is probably getting the opportunity to fly around in the Blackhawk helicopters around Iraq," he said in response to a question. "It's quite a sight up there."

As they sat huddled in the darkness each of the six local soldiers also spoke of missing simple pleasures like real pizza, home-cooked food and family gatherings during the holidays.

Friday night's conversations connecting Shelbyville with Iraq was moderated by Emily Longnecker, a reporter from WTHR in Indianapolis.

These moving images of soldiers sitting in a combat zone and chatting with family and friends choked up the weekend's featured performer Tim Spradlin, who presented the holiday musical "Stockings by the Fire."

"I couldn't be more honored to help these soldiers connect with their home," Spradlin, a 20-year veteran of the stage, stammered as the live feed concluded and the Christmas cabaret resumed. In fact, Spradlin appeared both awe-struck and reflective on stage after the event which seemed to influence the mood and tone of his next two musical choices: "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," and "Someday at Christmas."

It was a difficult thing to follow up on the emotions of seeing soldiers in the field putting their lives on the line and spending often lonely holidays away from home, but Spradlin and company pulled it off in professional and poignant way.

As both a veteran and a rather unsentimental dude who spent many holidays abroad, I think it is safe to say that the six

soldiers huddled in a cold, distant desert ?at- dawn were probably very moved to hear hometown voices singing ?Merry Christmas? to them. It was a damn nice touch to a rather emotion-filled weekend for the community and its soldiers, especially those who know first- hand the pain and hollow loneliness of duty-filled holidays spent away from friends and family.

Submitted by: Terrance Aldridge

This independent review does not express the opinion of the Strand Theatre.

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