

# Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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## Stockings by the Fire ? Review

Written by David on December, 16 2009

Christmas cabaret celebrates music of the Season

??Tis the season? and to commemorate and musically celebrate the holidays, The Strand Theatre hosted a Christmas cabaret; ?Stockings by the Fire? performed by Tim Spradlin and friends twice this weekend.

?This is an outstanding facility and I?m proud to be here,? Spradlin said opening Saturday night?s concert, which he promised would be like an old-school Christmas variety show.

Indeed, Spradlin kept his word during this evening of rousing vocals of the three distinctly talented singers and the inspired play of the lone musician on stage, Jeff Kunkel. This eclectic celebration of songs ran a harmonious gamut from cabaret music to blues, funk, and jazz-inspired tunes to two stunning operatic performances by local singer, Cindy Houpt, that hushed the house.

I don?t generally like, nor listen to, Christmas songs or musical theatricals but Saturday night?s show was a very entertaining and lively show that fulfilled Spradlin?s pledge to create a seasonal variety show.

Spradlin, who earlier this year performed a ?Beatles Show? at the Strand, seemed a lot more at ease in the spotlight of cabaret music and within the format of stage musicals. He was especially strong in songs building from soft refrains to rousing passions associated with Broadway productions. His vocal range and style of presentation seems suited to both belt out show-tunes and then to sing soft nostalgic laments of remembered love, gone wrong.

One thing that especially caught my mind?s eye Saturday night was the joy and enthusiasm of Spradlin?s willingness to share the spotlight with talents different and more diverse than his own. His unpretentious stage manner was made obvious by the first guest singer he ushered into the limelight of the Strand Theatre: Denise Sherman of Indianapolis.

This rather short woman with a deep-barrel of voice repeatedly channeled up spiritual reincarnations of Bessie Smith, Aretha Franklin and other female blues legends in the course of the evening.

However, for most people in the theatre and even for Spradlin the unexpected highlight and the spotlight of the weekend of performances by Houpt, a singer from Shelbyville.

?If you don?t already know, after tonight you will know what a treasure this community has in Cindy,? Spradlin said introducing her.

Houpt?s first song during the opening set was a sassy, semi-vampy version of ?Santa Baby,? that evoked the jazz-age tone, style and persona of Helen Kane, better known as the voice of Betty Boop.

It was during the second set that Houpt stole the show, first with a sweet sonorous psalm-like version of ?Oh Come all ye Faithful.? It was, however, her next song which hushed the crowd and sent chills up ?and- down the collective spine of the crowd, according to audience members. In this extended operatic variant of ?Ave Marie,? she displayed a divine voice to sing a divine song.

It was a mystical journey into the high art of an unbelievably sweet, rather angelic voice. A voice alone that reaches deep down inside you and grabs your soul and transports it to another world? a bright, resonant world of pure, un-distilled artistry.

Spradlin, in fact, was so impressed by Houpt?s talent that he arranged, rehearsed and then performed a duet with her which brought the crowd to its feet for standing ovation.

Walking in to this seasonal concert I wondered how Spradlin could fuse the often bawdy style of cabaret music with

traditional Christmas songs. Later, as I walked out of the Strand Theatre, this didn't seem to matter; even my inner Grinch was satiated and just happy to have witnessed and enjoyed an exceptional night of magic and music.

Submitted by: Terrance Aldridge

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

**Images on this post:**

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