

Cabaret Comes to Reno

WRITTEN BY SUSAN M. BOTICH

A new form of musical entertainment has hit Reno—the Cabaret Concerts Series presented by Silver Star Productions. Located at the charming Magic Underground Theater, part of the Pioneer Center in downtown Reno, this new concert venue reflects a casual yet elegant sense of style.

The cabaret itself, is an old tradition beginning in Paris, France. When Diane Dragone and Dennis Wigent, the husband-and-wife team of Silver Star Productions, moved from San Francisco to Reno, they wanted to share this unique and stylish form of musical entertainment with the Reno community. “We believe there really is a readiness for this type of thing,” says Wigent.

Silver Star Productions is a new company, but Dragone operated Star Classics in the Bay Area for 25 years, where she produced many concerts. She always had a love for the American standards, jazz and classics of the Broadway stage. When Dragone and Wigent moved to Reno, they found there was no place to go to hear their favorite music.

“This music hasn’t been done here, yet,” says Dragone. “We want to see if we can cultivate the audience for this. Locals like us haven’t had a place to go to hear the old standards. What we’re doing is really for the locals. We’re not concentrating on the transient visitor but we’re serving the people who are here all the time—the people who live here.”

It took a year to find the perfect location that could accommodate the intimate yet sophisticated setting Wigent and Dragone were hoping for. “The Magic Underground Theater is perfect for cabaret,” says Wigent. “Cabaret is a French word that connotes a small, intimate setting. The Magic Underground holds 170 seats and is intimate enough to house the concerts. It’s regular theater seating, though. So our Cabaret Concerts are blending the concept of cabaret with the concert setting that is intimate and cozy.”

Dragone explains that what makes Cabaret Concerts so special is that it’s great singers doing great songs in an intimate environment. “We’re not focusing on any age group. Our audience is people who love music and want to be able to hear it and appreciate it. That’s what we’re concentrating on. It’s time for folks to rediscover



this great music. People are rediscovering this kind of music. There are a lot of people who are dying to have this.”

The Cabaret Concerts’ ticket costs are kept very reasonable so more people can afford to attend more performances, according to Dragone and Wigent. “The value is very important,” Dragone says, and Wigent adds, “We want our Cabaret Concerts to be affordable and accessible to people. It’s not formal. It’s a ‘come-as-you-are’ type of evening.”

Sharon McNight dreaming

Cabaret Concerts started their series off with a bang. In early November, the remarkable Tony Award nominee, Sharon McNight, dazzled the audience with her powerhouse vocals interspersed with spontaneous jokes and banter with audience members. “My main entertainment focus is blues songs, impressions and entertainment—whatever it takes,” says McNight.

This wasn’t McNight’s first Reno performance. She first played in Reno in the 80s with Ruth Maddox, the country-western singer. How does she like Reno? “Reno audiences are warm and nice,” says McNight. “They like to laugh and have a good time, and I like to improvise. Spontaneity is my forte and I’ve pretty much always had the gift of gab.”

McNight’s gift of gab kept the audience in stitches for Saturday’s performance. Her accompanist, pianist Ron Snyder, never lost a beat during McNight’s spontaneous jokes deftly slipped in between numbers. When she launched into *To Dream the Impossible*



Dream from the Broadway musical, *Man of La Mancha*, she sang with such emotion that there was not a dry eye in the house.

Faith Prince belts it out

Tony Award-winner Faith Prince lit the hall December 9. Known for her versatility on both television and stage, Prince added her own brand of musical virtuosity to the concert series. This Broad-

jazz vocalists to emerge in the past decade," and have often compared her to Billie Holiday and Lena Horne. West's voice moves easily from her familiar luscious contralto to a strong midrange soprano.

West's critically-acclaimed CD, *Temptation*, was released in 1995, and includes old songs she loves such as *Temptation and You'll See* by Carroll Coates and *Peel Me A Grape* by Dave Frishberg. It was followed by *Restless*, and her latest release, *Come What May*. She is known to choose songs she likes personally and sings some as unconventional as *Don't Fence Me In* or the Pearl Bailey favorite *Tired*.

West has played in New York and Philadelphia, has appeared on both European and American broadcasts, as well as appearing in Switzerland and Italy several times. In 1997, she sold out her debut at the Maison de la Musique in Paris.

For more information, call Silver Star Productions, 775-851-1638 or visit www.silverstarreno.com. Tickets may be purchased at the Pioneer Box Office. ❁

Susan M. Botich is a freelance writer who began her writing career as a songwriter and poet while working as a professional musician in northern California from 1974 to 1988. She is currently working as a freelance writer for magazines and news publications throughout northwestern Nevada.

[TOP] **Sharon McNight and Cabaret Concerts' producers Diane Dragone and Dennis Wigent smile for their new Reno fans.**

[OPPOSITE] **Paula West, San Francisco's latest jazz phenomenon, reflects between songs.**

All photos courtesy of Silver Star Productions

SHANNONS