

Classic Chanteuse a Class Act at Aegis Living Jazz Artist Amanda King Performs in San Rafael

Aegis Living of San Rafael
San Rafael, CA

The monthly Aegis Presents event at Aegis of San Rafael assisted care complex may be the best entertainment deal in town. On a recent evening almost 100 guests and residents were treated to a lovely buffet of hors d'oeuvres, sweets and beverages before a musical treat in the dining room. The show was another coup by the facility's marketing director Meredith Browning, who this time snagged jazz artist Amanda King and her trio for the program. King, a San Francisco resident, has performed at Yoshi's, Jazz at Pearl's, the Razz Room, the now-closed Empire Plush Room and also with San Francisco Chamber Orchestra. Next week, she's off to make her New York City debut at Lincoln Center, where she will be the only West Coast singer invited to perform at the Opening Night Gala of the 21st New York Cabaret Convention. While there, King will debut at the famed Metropolitan Room with her "Forgotten Women, Lost Songs" tribute.

To round out her repertoire of standards, King pours through archives, recordings and old movies, in search of "little known gems from the '30's and '40's" that she presents as new again to modern audiences. Her husky alto voice has been described as a combination of Ella Fitzgerald, Carmen McRae (in the early years) and Dinah Washington. The delivery is smooth and the phrasing is sure. King has an infectious smile, a wonderfully open face and an actor's timing.

King comes from a solid theater background, having been a young apprentice at Actors Theatre of Louisville. Moving to San Francisco, King entered a 2003 Bay Area Cabaret Competition on a lark and became a finalist. Immediately she developed a following and her singing career started to blossom. A difficult divorce and custody battle left King homeless for a brief time, and it was through the gentle ministering of San Francisco's Raphael House that she not only found the shelter she needed, but also the encouragement to discover the inner strength and confidence which has enabled her to soar personally, professionally and vocally.

Introduced by well-known Marin singer Noah Griffin, King was accompanied by Shota Osabe on piano and Jean Repetto on bass. They joked that Griffin is her "daddy" because he played the role of her father in Duke Ellington's Jazz Opera, "Queenie Pie," which they performed at the Oakland Opera Theatre. King opened with jazz standard "A Night in Tunisia," also known as "Interlude," written by Dizzy Gillespie. Its complex bass line and mysterious quality makes the listener eager to hear more. "A Porter's Lovesong to a Chambermaid," one of King's current favorites, discusses the concept of partnership with such imaginative lines as: "If you'll be the oil mop, I will be the oil ... we could mingle every time we toil." A sing-along "Heart and Soul" was followed by a soulful rendition of "It's a Lazy Afternoon." King delivered the impish "Makin' Whoopee" with an appropriate twinkle in her eye. Then it was "Midnight Swinger," originally written as a country song. In "Johnny One Note", King, indeed, held that note. "Lost Mind" (in a wild romance) includes a lyric, "Would you be so kind to help me find my mind?" "Black Midnight" showed off piano and bass solos as well as King's velvet voice. In a nod to her rising career, Griffin serenaded King with "Unforgettable." Next was a poetic "Old Rockin' Chair Gets Me," written by Hoagy Carmichael. The set ended with a 1930s song, her 4-year-old son's favorite, "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen" (You're So Grand)." The punched-up "Bella Bella" and "Wunderbar" were rousing, and King followed this with Antonio Carlos Jobin's rhythmic "One Note Samba.

Throughout the show, King kept up an interesting mix of tempo and style, whimsy and romance, soul and introspection. Her swinging cabaret performance thrilled the Aegis Living audience. Wyn Ferguson was celebrating her first day at Aegis, and she and her daughters laughed that the reception and performance was a "welcome to Aegis party." Carolyn McNamara, caregiver for resident Donna Johnson, gave a thumbs up to "Makin' Whoopee," saying, "They've got that one down." Barbara Tracy, from San Anselmo, attending with husband Dick, thinks it is terrific that King studies and performs so many of the songs from the '30s, a time that they both believe had far better lyrics than do the songs of today.

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