

Youngstown Symphony in Ella Fitzgerald tribute (Feb. 10)

by Robert Rollin



Last Saturday evening February 10, conductor Randall Craig Fleischer and the Youngstown Symphony hosted three talented vocalists for an Ella Fitzgerald hundredth birthday tribute concert. The gifted vocalists, Carpathia Jenkins, Harolyn Blackwell, and Aisha de Haas were exceptional.

The Symphony's accompaniment, augmented by a expert rhythm section, was consistently excellent. Especially notable were pianist Jack Ciarniello's graceful short interjections and Donald Yallech Jr.'s subtle drumming. The expanded saxophone section was also outstanding.

Jenkins was particularly expressive on Rogers and Hart's *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered*. Short, sparkling piano solos decorated her attractive stylings. Her velvety tone adorned the performance of the Gershwin brothers' chestnut, *The Man I Love*, her clear diction making all the words of this marvelous classic clear and intelligible.

The lead singer's performance of Johnny Mercer's and Billy Strayhorn's *Satin Doll* was simple and elegant, leaving room for two attractive piano solos. The rendition of Ella Fitzgerald's own composition *A Tisket – A Tasket* (with Van Alexander) was given a lively Latin cast, but lacked Ella's incredible scat passages which launched the song to number one on the charts in 1938. Amusing sung exchanges between Jenkins and Fleischer added some informal fun.

Jenkins' brightest and most colorful solo was on Johnny Mercer's *Something's Got To Give*. Piano and drums solos added luster. She displayed her colorful low register, bringing the "dark and dirty" text of Johnny Mercer's *Blues in the Night* to life.

Harolyn Blackwell delivered the irony of the Gershwin brothers' *By Strauss* with appropriate clarity and grace. The renowned *S'Wonderful*, also by the Gershwins, began with a dreamy introduction, soon followed by the livelier body of the song. A tuba solo, and later, trombone interjections contrasted with Blackwell's creamy tone color.

Her performance of Harold Arlen's *Over the Rainbow* was simply gorgeous. She depicted Dorothy's naïve simplicity with panache and scintillated on Gershwin's *Summertime*, using her wonderful high range to highlight expressive passages

Aisha de Haas was stunning on Irving Berlin's *Blues Skies*, exploiting her talent for scat. She and Jenkins joined forces on Rogers and Hart's *The Lady is a Tramp* for energetic and beautiful two-part harmony. Her performance of Duke Ellington's *Don't Get Around Much Anymore* had the appropriate edginess, supported by an engaging sax solo. She did a fine job on the Gershwin brothers' *Foggy, Foggy Day*, and decorated Sam Coslow's *Mr. Paganini* and Hamilton's and Lewis' *How High the Moon* with terrific scat passages.

The three singers joined forces for the Gershwin brothers' *Strike up the Band*, Duke Ellington's *It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got That Swing*, and a rousing performance of Kurt Weill's *Mack the Knife*. The Symphony had its chance to shine on two instrumentals. Bill Strayhorn's *Take the A Train* boasted especially fine saxophone section playing. Louis Prima's *Sing, Sing, Sing*, featured an impressive clarinet solo by Benjamin Chen, another fine Yallech drum solo, and strong section playing from the brasses and saxophones.

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