

NANCY OSBORNE AND HER BAND A Fresh Look At Big Band Music

One thing was certain about big band vocalist Nancy Osborne, she came to entertain and showed she was ready, willing, and able to accomplish that goal! No newcomer to the appealing music of the golden period of American big bands, her singing credentials are considerable as “girl-singer” for a number of excellent bands and member of the Chordettes, a remarkable women’s a cappella quartet skilled in outstanding vocal harmonies and control without instrumental accompaniment (remember “Mr. Sandman?”). Osborne sang each song with a lyric intensification, no sung words slipped by without her enhancing touch and interpretation. High-energy and upbeat were the by-words of her program, except her final song, “Mr. Sandman,” now presenting it with accompaniment as a sultry solo version that answered my unasked request for a slower pretty tune to show another side of Nancy Osborne. It was engaging and beautiful. She had a confident presence on stage with a welcoming smile, inviting us to share and enjoy her uniquely personalized songs. Even her body language showed her complete involvement with her song and desire to give it her all for us. Clad in a stylish black cocktail dress and looking super, and her band in matching black color, they were dressed for business and ready to respectfully entertain their audience at the Valley Jazz Club in Canoga Park.

The songs were all carefully selected melodious, well-known great beauties with substance that Osborne could really get into, allowing her to show her vocal abilities and entertainment skills. She successfully took on challenging songs demanding much of a vocalist, as “Laura,” written by Hollywood’s notable composer for films, David Raksin, and foremost in the 1944 film bearing it’s name, starring Gene Tierney; “My Funny Valentine,” with unusual rhythmic arrangement by Don Peake, leader and arranger for all of Osborne’s songs; and, unexpectedly, “Old Man River,” as Osborne spoke of her affection for the river near her home in Maysville, Kentucky, during her early years. Others sung included “Route 66,” “Speak Low,” “Old Devil Moon,” “I Concentrate On You,” and “Hallelujah, I Just Love Him So.”

Musicians in the band were outstanding performance veterans that played aggressively with a full-head of steam in full support of their headliner vocalist. Members were Don Peake (leader, arranger, guitar), Richard Glasser (piano), Ron Barrows (trumpet), Dean Roubicek (saxophone), Billy Paul (drums), and Geo Valle (bass).

Nancy Osborne and Her Band came, played, and pleased. During their program, the Valley Jazz Club seemed like a Las Vegas club with a sophisticated, high-dollar show. Much effort went into their preparation and presentation of this polished concert. It’s big band traditional entertainment with contemporary updates and more punch.

Harvey Barkan