

THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MUSIC

Live Jazz: Cheryl Bentley at Vitello's

By Don Heckman

Dynamic. Enchanting. High spirited. Entertaining. Hard swinging. Those were just a few of the words that came to mind during Cheryl Bentley's appearance at Vitello's on Thursday night. And none of them were really adequate to describe her utterly mesmerizing performance.



Everyone knows Bentley from her long tenure with the Manhattan Transfer, of course. But, like her other partners in that remarkable quartet, she is less familiar as a solo artist. Which is regrettable. Because Bentley uses all the sophisticated dramatic artistry she has developed in her decades with the Transfer as the foundation from which to build her unique presentations in the spotlight.

Her Vitello's performance was nominally tied to the release of her superb new album, *The Gershwin Songbook*. And there was plenty of Gershwin on the program. An opening combination of "Fascinating Rhythm" and "I Got Rhythm" that tossed the melody in wild meanderings through the – of course – rhythm. "S'Wonderful" done in an irresistible groove, with bassist Reggie Hamilton and drummer Dave Tull providing the supercharged engine power. Some delightful interplay with guest singer Mark Winkler on "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off." And an encore version of "How Long Has This Been Going On?" with the sole accompaniment of Bentley's husband, Corey Allen, playing rollicking ragtime piano.

But there was more. An utterly gorgeous, understated but emotionally layered reading of Cole Porter's "Every Time We Say Goodbye" enhanced by Doug Webb's equally intimate tenor saxophone solo. Vincent Youmans' "Tea For Two" and Porter's "It's All Right With Me" done at mercilessly uptempo paces – again featuring fast fingered tenor work from Webb. And, perhaps best of all, the set piece that was the highlight among highlights of Bentley's performance – "Something Cool," the poignant cabaret jazz tune by Billy Barnes that was a 1954 hit for June Christy. In Bentley's hands it became a gripping, musical short story, told with exquisite blending of words and music – a model display of jazz singing at its finest.

The only downside of Bentley's appearance was that it was for one night only. Here's one vote for having her back, soon, for a long run.

Source: <http://irom.wordpress.com/2010/10/31/live-jazz-cheryl-bentley-at-vitellos/>
October 31, 2011. (Reprinted with permission)