

<http://theaterpizzazz.com/duke-ellingtons-birthday-tribute-to-the-king-ofjazz/>

THEATER PIZZAZZ

DUKE ELLINGTON'S BIRTHDAY— TRIBUTE TO THE KING OF JAZZ

POSTED ON APR 24, 2018 IN [MUSIC REVIEWS](#)



Marianne Solivan, Paul Jost

By Marilyn Lester

The great Duke Ellington, a jazz pioneer and arguably one of America's most gifted composers, has magic in his music. This was especially evident in The Maestro's birthday tribute at the elegant (and relatively new room for performance) Two E Bar at the Hotel Pierre. Singers Marianne Solivan and Paul Jost were sublimely inspired, delivering Ellington's best-of hits with plenty of toe-tapping swing. And most of their arrangements were created on the spot – an awe-inspiring testament to talent and musicality. This kind of artistry is the jazz ethic at work and at its best.

Solivan and Jost both have that deep feeling of jazz, with impeccable phrasing linked to an intuitive sense of timing. Duets were synergistic, and often with clever improvisations salting the mix. "Just Squeeze Me (But Don't Tease Me)" – a lesser-performed Ellington tune – contained a delightful riff of harmony, while "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" featured several call-and-response segments that added zest to the swing. The showstopper was a brilliant working of Richard Whiting's 1936 number, "I Can't Escape from You" (lyric by Leo Robin) begun by Solivan, with Jost singing the

counter-melody of Ellington's 1941 hit, "I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)." The effect of interweaving the two songs, with their similar chordal structures, was sheerly stunning. Their show finale, from "Satin Doll" to Jost riffing slowly on a few bars of Billy Strayhorn's "Take the A Train" to a full out "It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing" had the audience adding the "doo-wah" refrains with celebratory fervor. Ellington's music is like that; so very much of it is just naturally uplifting.



Solo numbers were equally energized and thoughtfully presented. Solivan, with her upbeat personality, was the talker of the duo, cheerfully dispensing tidbits of information and entertaining patter. A languorous version of Ellington/Strayhorn's 1941 "Daydream" was in large contrast to the super-swing, splendidly jazzed up "Love You Madly." In addition to having first-rate chops, it's evident Solivan's having a darn good time singing, and her delight can't help but elevate her vocalizations.

Jost's ability to inhabit the lyric is so intense and so deep he's just about peering out from within it. The man has soul. It also happens that he's a multi-instrumentalist, including drums, harmonica and guitar, and that mastery informs his style; Jost's delivery and phrasing is smooth, yet instrumentally driven, particularly evident on "In a Mellow Tone." His percussive sound effects, vocalese and scatting on Juan Tizol's "Caravan" was as mesmerizing as it was swinging.

Music directing was Hotel Pierre artist in residence, pianist Antonio Ciacca, whose light touch on the keys bears hints of influence from the classical as well as saxophone keying and phrasing. Working with Mike Karn on bass, Luca Santaniello on drums, and visiting Italian tenor sax player Gianfranco Minzella, the quartet opened the evening with a traditional spin on "I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart." The group played close to the melody, with creative interludes of improvisation that didn't

stray too far, yet contained enough musical ideas to satisfy even hardcore jazzheads. Later in the show, Ciacca played several contemplative bars of "Solitude" before morphing into a hard swing rendition of "Perdido" with the band. With Solivan and Jost, the group played tight, tuned into the groove. The sum total effort was a fitting birthday gift to Maestro Ellington on his 119th.