



NEWS REVIEWS VIDEO BLOGS

Music – June 2008

## Did The American Songbook Really End In 1965?

(Theresa L. Kaufmann Concert Hall, 92nd Street Y; 917 seats; \$60.) By **ROBERT L. DANIELS**

A 92nd Street Y presentation of *Lyrics and Lyricists*. Director and host, Andrea Marcovicci. Music director, Shelly Markham. Musicians: Lisa LeMay, Larry Saltzman, Jered Egan, Rex Benincasa. Stage manager, Lori Wekselblatt. Opened May 31, 2008. Reviewed June 1. Closed June 2.

Performers: **Francesca Amari**, Kelly Houston, Lee Lessack, Stacy Sullivan, Helen Marcovicci.

There is undoubtedly no one more qualified to pose the musical question, "Did the American Songbook Really End in 1965?" than Andrea Marcovicci. The glamorous diva of consummate grace and wisdom hosted a diverse program of song that suggested the songbook deserved an addenda to the pages that boast the legacies of Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Richard Rodgers, the Gershwins and those other notable composers and lyricists who graced the first half of the last century. Marcovicci, hosting the final concert of the 38th season of *Lyrics and Lyricists*, made an appreciable argument that an embarrassment of riches topped the best selling charts in the years that followed.

Marcovicci illustrated her well-taken point with her opening musical statement, "Secret of Life." The James Taylor tune was a great favorite of both Rosemary Clooney and Nancy Lamott in their final concert performances. Taylor's "lovely ride" encourages the listener to enjoy the passage of time and open the heart, and Marcovicci invested the message with her accustomed sense of harbored musical knowledge and poise.

The program was a tad overcrowded with nearly 40 songs, some of which might have received short shrift. Peter Allen's "I Go to Rio," John Denver's "Leaving on a Jet Plane" and Burt Bacharach's "The Look of Love" were hurriedly dismissed. Jimmy Webb's ardent query "Didn't We?" was given subtle reflection by baritone Lee Lessack and Marcovicci made an ardently assertive confession with Billy Joel's "Just the Way You Are." Both of those songs were elevated to songbook stature as recorded by Frank Sinatra.

A stately blond beauty by the name of Stacy Sullivan made a sweet travelin' statement with "Two for the Road" by Henry Mancini and Leslie Bricusse, **and a pert Francesca Amari turned "What I Did for Love" into a boldly fervent Broadway reflection.**

A pair of plaintive Jerry Herman ballads stressed the value of good melodic structure. Kelly Houston sang "If She Walked Into My Life" from "Mame" and Lessack rendered "I Won't Send Roses" from "Mack and Mabel." Both were richly flavored musical statements with words framed in infectiously melodic lines. They affirmed the old adage that you could leave the theater humming the tune. Unless I'm mistaken, that's not so easy to do anymore.

Other composers and lyricists on the concert roster included Carole King, Stevie Wonder, John Lennon, Carly Simon, Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon, Paul Williams, Michel Legrand, Dolly Parton, Stephen Schwartz, Cy Coleman, Dorothy Fields and Andrew Lloyd Webber. They all made impressive and lasting contributions to the history of American song.

Stephen Sondheim's only chart hit was the durable "Send in the Clowns" and Marcovicci explained the song's dark and elusive circus tradition, singing it with an actor's awareness of theatrical storytelling. An encore found the cast united for Sondheim's chummy declaration, "Old Friends."