



KARRIN ALLYSON CONQUERS AN ENTIRE WORLD OF JAZZ

Singer-pianist swings through an incredible range of music

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Karrin Allyson, who delighted a sellout crowd of 600-plus at Brookfield's Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts on Friday night, begs comparisons to Diana Krall. Both pianists found fame and fortune when they added jazz singing to their repertoire.

Based on her stunning performance Friday, Allyson is the superior artist and entertainer.

In fact, her show ranks with the area's premier jazz events this year.

Few singer-pianists in any genre are more versatile. Backed by a talented trio she's employed for 17 years, she ranged from the jazz mainstays - blues, ballads, scatting and vocalese - through country, pop, chansons, folk and - in

both Portuguese and French (!) - sambas. But no matter how far she traveled from mainstream jazz, Allyson never stopped swinging.

The glitches Friday weren't hers. Eight minutes past the event's scheduled start, a piano tuner was adjusting the Steinway concert grand. For a while, the spotlight operator couldn't find her. That was unaccountable, since she was hard for the customers to mislay in a snug, black and bare-backed creation and blond shag 'do, all appropriate parts swaying fetchingly.

But everything eventually got sorted out. And by the evening's second half, Allyson & Company were cooking. She did it partly by tacking away from all the medium-up tempos that opened the night and jibing over to ballads. There, she found the room to sustain and bend notes in supple and subtle ways.

To open the post-intermission set, Allyson and grand guitarist Rod Fleeman shared counterpoint, reading the Gershwins' majestic "How Long Has This Been Going On?" Then on to the jazz waltz "Under Paris Skies," in French, a Jobim samba in Portuguese and much more delicious eclecticism.



Although not chandelier-shaking, her smoky alto, with a dash of rasp for the blues, was big enough for the room. As always, it bulls-eyed every note with plenty of range and breath for everything she had in mind.

Before the night was out, she'd charged confidently over stage, keys, continents and genres. She added lyrics to notable jazz instrumentals such as Dizzy Gillespie's "Con Alma" and Nat Adderley's "Never Say Yes," revived her folkish hits "My Little Boat" and "The Duck" in dual languages and much more.

For the encore, she excused her accomplices, including bassist Bob Bowman and drummer Todd Strait, and accompanied herself on Jay Leonhart's lyrical homage "Robert Frost."

Nominated twice for Grammys, Allyson has yet to win. They'd better polish up several. At 44, Karrin Allyson is long overdue.