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10/21/10 • By Bruce Klauber

Andy Kahn: Songs of the Spirit

Pianist/Singer/Record Producer in stellar, Philadelphia and Atlantic City performances.

ANDY KAHN: SONGS OF THE SPIRIT

Before there was Michael Feinstein, Michael Buble, Harry Connick and the rest, there was--and there is--Andy Kahn.

The Philadelphia-based jazz pianist, singer and record producer has been performing the works of America's legendary composers of popular song, since his age was, shall we say, in the single digits.

His appearances in Philadelphia and elsewhere have been unfortunately infrequent for the past several seasons, but recently, he has embarked on a series of shows--all sold out, by the way--where he sings and plays the music of the masters: Gershwin, Berlin, Cahn, Van Heusen, Mercer, and their worthy constituents.

"Music by Intention" is the title of his concerts. "The songs with their melodies and their lyrics," Kahn explains, "are the essence of our lives. Our spirit is transformed by the songs of our lives."

Via recent concerts at The Palm in Philadelphia and Atlantic City, Kahn demonstrated that his knack for musicality, integrity, taste and sense of time, joy and swing has only increased with age.

Indeed, Andy Kahn is, thankfully, transforming a lot of spirits these days.

As a pianist, he has never been a "lick player." Though the general influence of Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans, and three of his teachers--Al Stauffer, Bernard Peiffer and Jimmy Amadie--pervades in a general sense, careful listeners will hear none of their stock phrases, or anyone else's stock phrases, for that matter. Kahn's playing, since childhood, has been pretty much original, a rarity in any of the arts.

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When pressed, he can do a mean impression of Lennie Tristano, which he did on an instrumental encore of "Dark Eyes." These days, Kahn has been informally concertizing with Tristano disciple Connie Crothers, which has only heightened his appreciation of the late genius of the piano. Listeners at these shows would likely love to hear a bit more of this.

The songs in Kahn's concerts are familiar ones, and his devoted and adoring audiences could hardly be stopped from singing along to stalwarts like "Blue Moon," "I'm Old Fashioned," "Day in Day Out," "In the Still of the Night" and "I Thought About You."

In terms of his singing voice, his tone and intonation have vastly improved over the past several years. While there was never any doubt that Andy Kahn truly feels these lyrics, his delivery of them is, if anything, even more sincere these days.

A significant part of this presentation were Kahn's witty, incisive and intelligent remarks about the composers and their work. These comments made the music--and its makers--come even more alive.

In addition to his "Music by Intention" concerts, Kahn remains quite active in the recording studio as a producer. After all, he wrote and produced the number one disco record of 1978, "Hot Shot." Lately, there have been several re mixes and new compositions that have hit the dance charts in a big way. Those activities, like his jazz playing, represent separate entities and are not a part of "Music by Intention."

When you're multi-talented, you can't hit audiences with everything at once.

"It is, and remains the intention of all composers and lyricists to document what it is about being human that keeps us at it, keeps us alive," Kahn explains. "They show us the way. They confirm what we already know in our hearts and minds, but most people are unable to express it. So they do it for us. And in so doing, they influence us throughout our lifetimes. They influence future generations with the thumbprints they place upon previous ones. We're affected by the compositions. We're moved to smile, to frown, to shed tears of sadness and weep with the joy invoked in us. "

Andy Kahn's musical intentions have been, without exception and on every front, certifiably, joyously and quite successfully fulfilled.

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