

PACIFICA TRIBUNE

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Jean Bartlett, Arts Correspondent

LIVE at San Francisco's Ritz Carlton

A little night rhythm and Zen _with vocalist Jennifer Lee There's a peacefulness about singer, musician Jennifer Lee; a calmness as equally rooted in the comfort of friends as in the ribbon of a melody. With a disarming sense of humor and the know-how to arrange a song to fit her groove, she started her Saturday night concert at the Sanchez Concert Hall in a crowd full of strangers and ended her encore in a room full of smiles. The house vocalist at San Francisco's Ritz Carlton, Lee also plays piano, composes and knows how to drop a jaw with her rhythm ease on guitar. Having worked many years as an instrumentalist and arranger, Lee was once known only by her closet as a singer with the right stuff. Her recently released CD J-Walkin' pretty much burns that door off the hinges with its great vocal layer of straight-ahead jazz, tintured and infused by musical callings from the gardens of Brazil, lullaby land and down in the basement funk. A fair amount of melodies from that new CD were performed at Saturday night's concert as Lee was joined on stage by Jeff Buenz on guitar, John Hettel on standup bass and Rich Kuhns on accordion. Lee often singled out her co-musicians with compliments, introductions and nods, with reason... Still, Lady Lee needs to put her own name out to the audience from time to time, just so there can be a little release of stored up ovation. Irving Berlin's "Blue Skies" introduced the audience to Lee's finger snap way with casual cool. But the second song up, George and Ira Gershwin's "S'Wonderful!" with its silky mood and Brazilian beat, showcasing Lee on both vocal and rhythm guitar, established a sort of Jobim aphrodisiac which wove in and out of Lee's Saturday night serenade. Lee's version of the

jennifer lee

vocalist · pianist · guitarist

Carmichael/Webster tune “Baltimore Oriole” blew steam in all the right places and made for one smart duet jive between accordion and bass. Lee’s flirty cheek-to-cheek rendition of Cole Porter’s “Night and Day” made it clear why this was the song that “snagged her a husband” a few years back. A voice and bass duet grabbed a tom-tom tempo and shook it out sweet on the Lee and Hettle rendition of “Day By Day” (Cahn/Stordahl/Weston). “I Don’t Want To Fall” (Brancato/Bryson) was a smooth jazz waltz. Jobim’s “Ligia” was explained by Lee as being a song of longing tinged with bitterness and sarcasm; her delivery a gentle caress of the hauntings of almost love. Had Lee delivered this song simply with her vocal and guitar it would have been incredibly fantastic. With her onstage musicians there to lend an extra hand, particularly guitarist Buenz, this song went on into the realm of beyond all that...Then there was Lee’s every which way good rendition of “I’ll Remember April” (Raye/DePaul/Johnson); her great tell-a-Zen-tale and make-like-a-thundering mystic rhythm on Frank Loesser’s “The Inchworm”, and her sweet potato pie breakdown on Jon Hendricks’ “O Pato” (with outrageous bubble pop guitar by Buenz) that kept her audience clear on the fact, this was a seatbelts-on performance. Lee and band mates made the stuff of dreams on a vision medley arrangement of “On a Clear Day/Never Never Land” (Lerner/Lane) (Comdem/Green/Styne). “I Love Being Here With You” (Lee/Schluger) closed out the night with lyrics, melody and song satisfaction that just made one want to turn back the hands of time. The Henderson/Dixon classic “Bye Bye Blackbird” satisfied the heat on the audience’s call back ovation. Jennifer Lee told her audience that, “Music helps to keep my thoughts in a positive place.” Thanks Ms. Lee for keeping the Zen light on while cranking up your audience with a capture of the sweet.

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