



Wild Rose Jazz Band

Before getting into my review, I'd like to congratulate the lovely folk at the Kelowna Community Concert Association for bringing back the Wild Rose Jazz Band Wednesday to the Community Theatre. It was another triumph for the KCCA.

The Wild Rose ensemble is staffed by members whose virtuosity is matched only by their musicianship. And the joy radiated by the players quickly spread to the audience.

The band members displayed a broad range of charisma--or lack thereof--but the competence of every member was breathtaking. For example, John Gray, who played a bass guitar and not a double bass, had virtually no contact with the crowd; yet his impeccable picking was an absolute pleasure.

Pianist Rod Schmidt likewise upstaged nobody, but his piano playing was pure perfection.

Coleader Jim English emanated calm competence. He seemed more oriented to the score than some of his colleagues. His trombone was played with beautiful tone and enviable technique. Moreover, his versatility as master of ceremonies, singer and player of what looked like a piccolo trumpet was outstanding.

My wife, who was once the wife of Croatia's most celebrated clarinetist, knows good clarinet playing when she hears it. She was completely taken by Ed Barlow's tone, technique, breath control and improvisational ability. Barlow, probably Wild Rose's oldest member, dropped his reed at one point and retrieved it gingerly, with great effort. But his nimbleness when playing that licorice stick was utterly astounding.

Not even mentioned in the program but displaying boundless youthful energy and stamina was trumpeter Johnny Summers. He was a last-minute replacement for vocalist Hazel Proctor, who is recovering from pneumonia. The crowd, sorry to miss Proctor's soulful blues and Dixie styling, soon, however, went wild for Summers' towering talent. He is a consummate artist.

That leaves drummer and coleader Greg Baker. And for good reason, because Baker almost defies description. He is a fantastic percussionist, a clown, a raw nerve, and a vocal impressionist who can elicit a smile, a sigh, or even a tear.

The program was a tribute to New Orleans jazz, so of course it contained loads of good, old fashioned Dixieland music. Because I am fond of counterpoint, I was in heaven listening to those marvellous jazz licks as they wove the Dixieland fabric. It was an event to remember.

Charles Velte is a former opera singer (1962-67) who holds a Master of Music degree in Music Theory from the University of Wisconsin (1961). He now leads a music appreciation group at the Society for Learning in Retirement.