

Lovers of American jazz singing flocked to Birdland Sunday evening to hear one of our finest: Carol Sloane, in a rare New York appearance. She acknowledged her adoring fans by opening with YOU WERE MEANT FOR ME (Freed/Brown) in a gentle swing as she settled into her chair center stage. Sloane is one of America's foremost jazz singers with dozens of albums from the 50's up to the present. Angling herself onto her chair/throne, this tiny woman (she said she was shrinking daily) almost reminded me of Edith Ann (Lily Tomlin), but when those warm tones came forth, all was well with the world.

One of the earliest treats in her set, EARLY AUTUMN (Burns/Herman/Mercer), nearly put you in a trance, particularly with the awesome playing of the brilliant Mike Renzi on piano. I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT YOU'RE IN LOVE WITH ME (McHugh/Gaskill) provided her with just a slight chance to scat, a la Ella Fitzgerald, who once said Sloane was one our best, surely high praise. She had a bit of fun with FRASIER (THE SENSUOUS LION) (Rowles/Mercer) and sang the true story AN OLDER MAN IS LIKE AN ELEGANT WINE (Lee Wing) that many could relate to. Jay Leonhart provided perfect accompaniment, and a bit of his own scatting, on bass.

By the time she got to her always-required Ellington tune, SOPHISTICATED LADY, she was certainly in full command and proved why she is so highly admired. She was obviously moved by the lyrics she was singing and honored to be singing those lovely lines of music. Then, she literally stopped the show with the most awesome display of performing TWO FOR THE ROAD (Mancini/Bricusse) that surely will be remembered by all as the best account of this beautiful ballad. And ballads, of course, are what Sloane is mostly admired for, although she can swing with the best of them.

I had to laugh to myself while she was singing YOU'RE DRIVING ME CRAZY (WHAT DID I DO?)(Walter Donaldson) because her What Did I Do's were delivered with an almost WTF attitude, that only a loved one could understand. A Sloane concert is not complete without a piece by her beloved late friend Sir Richard Rodney Bennett (often her partner in concerts/recordings), and I'LL ALWAYS LEAVE THE DOOR A LITTLE OPEN (music by Johnny Mandel), hopefully meant that she will always be there to sing for us as time marches on. We need her now more than ever. Welcome back to New York Ms. Sloane, and may you return very, very soon.

~ Gregg Culling