

Hot jazz on a cold winter's night

REVIEW

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For The Times

PORT COLBORNE

A midwinter's night swing created some much needed heat as the Swing Shift Big Band took over the stage at the Roselawn Centre Saturday night and let the notes fly out. Mixing equal amounts of big band favourites, classic standards and soft-grained ballads, the group hit the mark with a notable mix of showmanship and musicianship.

This Odessa-based band, now in its seventh year, is made up of 17 seasoned instrumentalists who play with infectious energy and individual style. In common with many of the bands that have played in the Roselawn jazz series, with the exception of the amazing teens of the Toronto All-Star Big Band, these performers have maturity on their side. Baby boomers, and better, they have become big favourites with audiences everywhere and it is easy to understand their appeal.

This is music made for dancing and under the leadership of saxophonist Jim John the musicians quickly gathered the audience into their special palais de dance where the rhythm, the tightly



Vocalist Jan Laurie, left, joins the Swing Shift Big Band on stage at the Roselawn Centre Saturday night for the last of the current Jazz Series. (MANNING PHOTO FOR THE TIMES)

spring beat and bright sounds encouraged feet to tap and tingle. The addition of a vocal trio and female soloist made the listening pure enjoyment.

After opening with the crisply played 'I Could Write a Book' (about swing music we presume), the band brought the considerable intensity to 'Track 24' which featured a shimmering trombone solo, some quicksilver guitar playing and

a resonant saxophone solo. Memorable was Don Menza's 'Groovin' Hard' which introduced us to the delights of jazz drumming and a burnished tenor sax solo that reached deep into the music.

The kicky, bouncy beat of 'Switch in Time' by Sammy Nestico had some lovely soaring trombone passages. This was followed by the pervasive loppety beat of 'Sing, Sing, Sing' in which the drumming

got even hotter, striding and strutting until it seemed impossible to go on. But the beat did continue. With polished sounds in 'Score 68', smooth swinging in Nelson Riddle's 'Stella by Starlight', a gospel beat in 'Tall Cotton' and pulsating with a piercing sax solo in the classic 'Sweet Georgia Brown'.

Slowing the tempo was the languid dreamy 'Early Autumn' and the mood atmospheric 'Lonely Street' to which Jim John contributed a finely inflected saxophone solo. 'My Furry Valentine' was a melting adagio with a haunting, lost falling note.

Vocalist Jan Laurie brought her exuberant, wide-open voice to such pleasures as 'All of Me', 'That's All' and 'I Don't Mean a Thing'. She gave an uninhibited account of 'Oyus Ous' and floated her voice through the registers in the soulful slow ballad 'Skylark'.

The Trio Bella, Larisa, Cathryn and Erica, harmonised their bright voices in 'Moonglow Picnic', 'Sentimental Journey' and brought back the Andrews Sisters' sound in 'Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy' before sending us home with echoes of the Checkmates in 'Mr Sandman' and down the road on the 'Chattanooga Choo Choo'.

It's a long time 'til September when we'll be able to enjoy more fine jazz at Roselawn with another fine line-up. Happy listening.