

Amanda King — The Princess of Swing

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Amanda King Swings & Sings in *Forgotten Women, Lost Songs*. Photo by Jonathon Farrell.

Amanda King is a young jazz/cabaret artist well on the road to entertainment royalty. She recently brought Bay Area cabaret lovers *Forgotten Women, Lost Songs* at The RRazz Room, focusing on three women — Blanche Calloway, Mildred Bailey and Bea Wayne — all pioneers in music and not necessarily just for their gender. King's radiant presence, sparkling eyes and out-of-this-world smile projects a sincere warmth and true love of her craft, evoking the essence of stars of the 1930-50s while maintaining her own style and heart.

King is a Princess of Swing, zippin' a tune with spark and vitality that highlights aspects of the song that are rarely noticed, yet truly there. Where others might choose a more languorous approach, King gets to business finding the joyful beat inside. Case in point is her inspired version of "Skylark," making it her own with an easy driving rhythm, illuminating the song in a fresh new light. Instead of drawn-out longing, King's version has a joyous anticipation, her heart riding the wings of the titled bird with hope. A successful and personalized approach. Ditto with "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." Where others would take a sustained, reserved approach, King swings as she sings this classic, perking the ears up. The audience took a collective lean forward, engaged and enthralled with the surprise take.

Her first song of the evening, however, is "Slap That Bass," and it gives a full sampler platter of King's multi-hued palette: rich, full, playful, a love of entertaining and many gifts to offer. "Black Moonlight" shows King's delicious low notes running along currents of a saturated, healthy midrange, embellished with a smattering of well-placed vibrato shimmering an appropriate light around the mood and lyrics. "Heart & Soul" makes one think of a keyboard duet in beginning piano class when we hear the title, but King gives us a grown-up, jazzy version that choreographic-great Jack Cole would have been inspired by in his time (do a Wikipedia search on Cole to see his influence in entertainment).

In an evening of excellence, of special note is her encore. She returned to the stage, was going to change her selection, then decided to stay with what she rehearsed. Lucky for us. What she does with "Lazy Afternoon" is beyond exquisite. Here, she plays the mood down-tempo, inhabiting the long, luxurious, sensual and sense-filled events of a quiet day meant to be shared. Jaw-droppingly-good, this should be a King signature tune. She transports the audience and sends us off with this melting, luscious melding of artist and song.

There's not a false note on a single song from King's side of the stage. Her bassist, Chuck Bennett, is old-school, swing/be-bop-tastic. A brilliant artist. Shota Osabe is tight and sparkling on the keys. And charismatic drummer Surya Nur Patri is a good percussionist, but his style often didn't completely mesh with the other artists on stage.

If I had to point out less-strong aspects, it would be that the theme was dropped about two-thirds of the way through the evening. The narrative that connects doesn't thread all the way through: the three women are no longer referred to and the songs offered are not lost. Though this is a minor quibble, any time an evening is themed, it's necessary to see the theme all the way through, or not have this particular theme.

Keep an eye out for King (we'll feature a CD by her this month). Visit her website at AmandaKing.com.