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Tim Schall's 1961 Makes a Smooth Year for Cabaret: Review

by Mark Bretz Mar 25, 2014



Description: If two recent performances by Ken Page and Tim Schall serve as appropriate litmus tests, it would seem that Jim Dolan's Gaslight Cabaret Festival is a big hit with local audiences.

Page's performance in February kicked off the festival in grand style, playing to a full and appreciative house at the cozy Gaslight Theater. Last Saturday, Schall, who has been in the forefront of developing the cabaret sound and style in St. Louis in the last few years, reprised his February 22nd engagement before another packed house.

Schall titled his performance *1961*, in deference to several significant events he mentioned at the beginning of the show, including a coy reference to his own birth as well as a knowing nod to the enormously successful TV series, *Mad Men*, which is set in that era. He cleverly noted that 1961 was a truly rare year, in that it reads the same upside down as right side up, something that won't happen again until 6009. "We'll all be available for the senior discount," he added dryly.

The talented troubadour shaped tunes from that year with a rich, pure voice that ranges from operatic (on an aria sung in 1961 by Luciano Pavarotti) to an easy, measured pop style on ballads including *Stand by Me* and *Moon River*.

He also had the good sense to back up his own efforts with a magnificent musical trio comprised of Ben Wheeler on bass and the former Jasmine duo of Carol Schmidt at the piano and Michele Isam on bongo drums, percussion, saxophone and harmonica. Under the fine-tuned direction of Lara Teeter and Schmidt's musical direction, it was a fluid and smoothly-paced performance finished all too soon.

Hearing Isam and Schmidt back up Schall and his guitar on a rocking version of *Money*, once performed by The Beatles at the Cavern Club in Liverpool in that signature year of 1961, was a highlight of the evening.

Actually, there were highlights in abundance throughout the performance. Schall noted the historical significance of the original Gaslight Square in 1961, where a young comedy duo named The Smothers Brothers were a headline duo with an opening act featuring a young singer from New York City. He then sang a haunting version of *Soon It's Gonna Rain* from a fledgling off-Broadway musical back then called *The Fantasticks*, which Barbra Streisand likely sang here.

Watching Isam slickly move across the bongos was most enjoyable, as was her time on a mouthpiece duplicating the efforts of young Robert Zimmerman, aka Bob Dylan, as Schall sang a paean Dylan wrote to his folk music hero, Woody Guthrie.

Schall reminded the audience several times, justifiably so, of the melodious contributions of Isam, Schmidt and Wheeler. He talked about his surprise at learning that two of the year's biggest hits were written by Hoagy Carmichael, a fact that seems jarring when listening to songs performed by The Beatles and Dylan on the same program.

Still, as Casey Stengel would have said right about the time the New York Mets came into existence, "You could look it up." Or you could simply sit back and delight in the well-blended harmony of three accomplished musicians and Schall, who truly knows how to put together a first-rate cabaret act.

Still to come at the Gaslight Cabaret Festival are Connie Fairchild (March 28), Joe Dreyer & Rosemary Watts (March 29), Morgan Faulkner (April 3), Katie McGrath (April 4), Todd & Kelly Decker (April 5), Taylor Pietz (April 10), Storm Large (April 11-12) and Lara Teeter (April 25-26).

Cabaret: Gaslight Cabaret Festival

Company: Dolan Productions

Venue: Gaslight Theater, 358 North Boyle

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Dates: February 22 through April 26

Tickets: From \$22 to \$40; contact 725-4200, www.licketytix.com, www.gaslightcabaretfestival.com or www.presentersdolan.com